POLITICS AND PERSUASION IN ARISTOPHANES' *ECCLESIAZUSAE*

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BY

KENNETH S. ROTHWELL, JR.

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For my mother
and father

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ABBREVIATIONS

AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
BICS	*Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, University of London*
CP	*Classical Philology*
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CW	*Classical World*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, Byzantine Studies*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
K	Kock, Th., ed. *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*. Leipzig, 1880–88.
LSJ	Liddell, H.G., R. Scott and H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. Oxford, 1940.
PCG	*Poetae Comici Graeci*. ed. R. Kassel and C. Austin. Berlin and New York, 1983–.
PCPS	*Cambridge Philological Society, Proceedings*
PMG	*Poetae Melici Graeci*. ed. D. Page. Oxford, 1962.
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association*
QUCC	*Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*
RE	*Pauly-Wissowa Realencyclopaedie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
WJA	*Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft*
YCS	*Yale Classical Studies*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigrafik*

INTRODUCTION

We might begin with the unorthodox social and sexual arrangements of the Oneida Community, a utopian commune established in upstate New York by John Humphrey Noyes in 1848. The group, which at one point reached 205 members, practiced "Bible Communism": all property and profits—greater than other utopian communities because of their willingness to industrialize—were jointly owned. They were as one family, dining in one hall and raising children together. Sexual relations were communal as well; instead of selfish monogamy, the Oneida Community practiced what it called "Complex Marriage." Lest personal attachments overshadow group feeling, members were urged to "keep in circulation," although this meant that the paternity of children born there was difficult to establish. Young men and women were prevented from having sexual relations because it was feared that they were in particular danger of forming unhealthy, "exclusive" attachments. Noyes thus developed the doctrine of "Ascending Fellowship" wherein the young were to follow the guidance of older, more experienced members in sexual matters. Noyes at times offered to undertake this responsibility himself, especially for the benefit of the virgins of the community.

The reader will recognize here a patriarchal version of the society sketched out by Praxagora in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* (it also resembles that of Plato's *Republic*, but I will return to that problem later). Praxagora remakes Athens along utopian lines: communal property, communal dining, abolition of monogamy with preference in choice given to older members and even the consequent lack of clear paternity. For my purposes, however, the important lesson to be drawn from this analogy is the cause of the Oneida Community's dissolution in 1879. To be sure, human nature being what it is, Complex Marriage could not prevent some members from occasionally forming personal attachments and intrigues; worse, young men of the community were at times on overly friendly terms with the girls hired from outside to work in the dining hall. Moreover, it seems that many of the virgins Noyes initiated into sexual experience were on average thirteen years of age, and Noyes had to flee to Canada in 1879 when threatened with legal action under immorality laws. Yet the most important cause of the breakup of the community had to do not with sex but with leadership. "When age and infirmity, in the form of deafness and a throat ailment which largely prevented his public speaking, to some degree lessened his effectiveness, his hold over the flock

weakened, as it was bound to."[1] Noyes evidently had commanded obedience with his eloquence and magnetism; this was the glue of the community. Bereft of voice he resorted to written memoranda which were, like the Pope's bull against the comet, impotent. With Noyes unable to articulate his views in person, the common interest faltered, private ambitions surfaced and the consensus began to break apart even before his abrupt departure for Canada.

These are the concerns of the *Ecclesiazusae:* the play shows the tension between public interests and private motives, between the persuasiveness of politicians in their attempts to achieve public consensus and the selfish recalcitrance of certain members of the common people (the *dêmos*). The catalyst needed to resolve this tension was what the Greeks called *peithô*, persuasion. It had been to this that the comic poet Eupolis ascribed Pericles' political leadership: "A kind of persuasion (πειθώ) sat on his lips. That is how he, alone among the orators, bewitched and left a sting in the ears of his audience" (102*PCG* = 94K). But *peithô* was not confined to politics and rhetoric; just as John Humphrey Noyes's gifts were sexual as well as oratorical, it crossed into the domain of seduction and erotic desire as well: when Pindar called the temple prostitutes at Corinth "Handmaidens of Peitho," he did not do so because they "were good at chatting up their clients."[2] Thus through *peithô* these ostensibly unrelated spheres of human activity, *erôs* and politics, were automatically linked in the minds of the Greeks, and in this study I seek to show that the *Ecclesiazusae* dramatizes this linkage. I believe that if we examine the way the play engages the issues of sexual relations and political affairs—and their application to public and private interests—we can identify an area of significance hitherto obscured and arrive at a fuller understanding of the play.

Peithô is an important concept throughout Greek literature: R.G.A. Buxton has recently discussed its function in *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy* (1982). Persuasion constitutes a major theme in several of Aristophanes' comedies; he often caricatures the fickleness of the *dêmos* and the ability of politicians to manipulate them. The *Knights*, for example, explicitly likens politics to seduction. The role of persuasion in the *Birds* has been discussed by William Arrowsmith. Lysistrata invokes it by name in her play. There can be no question but that the audience would have recognized the

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[1] Robertson 1972, 15; other good accounts of the community and its dissolution are Carden 1969 and Hayden 1976.

[2] Fr. 122 (Snell); Winnington-Ingram 1983, 200. We will see that according to popular tradition Pericles himself learned his craft from one such "Handmaiden of Peitho": Aspasia.

theme and its implications, yet if *peithô* is commonplace, its role in each play was acted out in different ways. The *Ecclesiazusae* is an exceptionally good vehicle for an examination of it: taking advantage of the multiplicity of meanings in *peithô*, Aristophanes explores various means by which *erôs* and politics are intertwined in the *Ecclesiazusae* and gives them dramatic expression. We will see, for example, that would-be seductresses will resort to the language of politics. The plot of the play frequently deals with the difficulties of reconciling *peithô* (as either seduction or persuasion) and *bia* (force). Praxagora, the protagonist, a young, appealing, even seductive woman—and also rhetorically adept—virtually personifies *peithô*.

The issues raised here are, I think, interesting and important. The role of persuasion in Athenian democracy anticipates what the 20th century has come to know—in Max Weber's formulation—as "charismatic" leadership: the source of the demagogue's power is not merely rational but emotional and subjective.[3] *Peithô*, encompassing both seduction and persuasion, is a fundamental component of this power. Certainly the question of "sex appeal" in politics is one that remains with us. Intimately related to this is the attitude of the politician's audience, the citizenry. Ingrained apathy can defeat even the most forceful speaker, and narrow, private self-interest can undermine appeals to larger public interests. These are timeless concerns, and they are conspicuous in the *Ecclesiazusae*. This monograph will also show that the portrayal of women in the *Ecclesiazusae* is key to an understanding of *peithô*, rhetoric and politics; moreover, this portrayal, which paradoxically draws on conventions of pederasty, has an important place in the history of women in the comic tradition.

I will set out my reading of the play in the third and fourth chapters after reviewing the issues raised by *erôs*, politics, and *peithô* in Chapter Two. Yet several topics in the scholarship on the *Ecclesiazusae*—satire, politics, women, and the shape of the plot in Old Comedy—are already fixed features in the broader landscape of Aristophanic scholarship, and a visit to these becomes indispensable; this I undertake in Chapter One.

This monograph is a revision of a Ph.D. dissertation which I completed at Columbia in 1985 and as such it has benefitted from the criticism of several readers, including Profs. James Coulter (my chief sponsor, whose assistance has been indispensable), Helene Foley, and Richard Janko. Profs. Wallace Gray and James Mirollo also made helpful comments. The award of a Batchelor (Ford) faculty fellowship from Holy Cross College

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[3] Weber 1947, 328–340.

allowed me to finish further revisions. I am grateful to my colleague Deborah Boedeker for taking the time to read it at an earlier stage and to John Marincola for his comments. I also owe a great deal to the anonymous reader, who persuaded me to rethink many poorly conceived ideas. I have probably not rethought enough; the faults that remain are of course my own. Pam has helped more than she realizes.

The translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. I have followed R.G. Ussher's text of the *Ecclesiazusae* (1973).

December, 1989

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CHAPTER ONE

CRITICAL PROBLEMS IN THE *ECCLESIAZUSAE*

A) *Satire and politics*

To begin at the end: in the closing scene of the *Ecclesiazusae*, the chorus leader, asking for a favorable verdict from the judges of the dramatic competition, professes to have bestowed wisdom (σοφῶν, 1155) as well as laughter. Similar assertions of a serious didactic or political purpose can be found throughout the Aristophanic corpus: in the *parabasis* of the *Frogs*, for example, the chorus announces that it intends to "advise and teach" the *polis*,[1] and the Athenians evidently thought Aristophanes had succeeded, if an ancient source is to be believed, because they awarded him a crown on the occasion.[2] The women of the *Lysistrata* want "to offer counsel to the state" (648) and the play as a whole is an undisguised censure of the Greeks for prolonging the ruinous Peloponnesian War.[3] But such rebukes could be hazardous: Cleon was so incensed by criticism from Aristophanes in 426 B.C. that he apparently took the latter to court,[4] and Socrates, on trial for his life in 399 B.C., identified Aristophanes as the "more dangerous" of his two kinds of accusers.[5] There can be little doubt about the seriousness of his satirical attacks or political aims, yet Aristophanes' inconsistencies over the years thwart attempts to pin any one political label on him. We can share Socrates' frustration; we too would like to cross-examine Aristophanes. Even the ridicule of Cleon in the *Acharnians* and *Knights*, which at first blush seems transparently partisan (Aristophanes, the conservative, holds an ideological grudge against the democratic demagogue), becomes more ambiguous under careful examination.[6] G.E.M. de Ste. Croix's conclusion that he was a "Cimonian" conservative,[7] even if valid in the 420's, is of questionable

[1] *Frogs* 686–87; for other instances of this (in the political tradition established by Cratinus) see Gelzer 1970, 1528–29.

[2] Koster 1975, 135 (*Vita Aristophanis* XXVIII. 40–43).

[3] See now Dillon 1987, 97–104, on the plea for peace and Henderson 1987a, xv–xxv, on the context of the *Lysistrata*.

[4] *Acharnians* 377–84; Edmunds 1987, 56.

[5] *Apology* 18b; Carrière 1979, 47, points to the alarming number of politicians attacked in comedy who were eventually disgraced, exiled, executed or assassinated.

[6] Edmunds 1987, 3–4, 59–66.

[7] de Ste. Croix 1972, 357.

help in understanding the *Ecclesiazusae*; de Ste. Croix's analysis virtually ignores the last two plays, and Carrière has doubted whether a term like "Cimonian" would still be relevant in the climate of the 390's.[8] The concerns of the 390's had nothing to do with Cleon or the Peloponnesian War, and we will not even find it particularly useful to look for an ongoing struggle between conservative aristocrats and radical democrats in this play. Since I am convinced that the *Ecclesiazusae* should be read in light of contemporary political and social trends, an attempt to put the play in its proper context—something that has only been done in superficial ways—becomes an essential part of my enterprise.[9]

1. Athens in the 390's

Because the political fortunes of Athens in the period after the Peloponnesian War have been chronicled elsewhere, it will be enough here to summarize the relevant events, to identify issues of the day and personalities that Aristophanes is likely to have satirized, and (what will prove more important) to outline the attitudes and sentiments that would have been characteristic of the audience. Although the early fourth century had its own share of temporary successes and disappointments for Athens, the period as a whole has been reassessed by historians in the last decade or so. Whereas many accounts have stressed Athens' political disunity or the gulf between rich and poor,[10] more recently we have been given a picture of relative unity and moderate (if not universal) economic recovery.[11] Scholarship on Aristophanes, however, exclusively reflects the former view,[12] and a corrective is in place; my object in this chapter is, in

[8] Carrière 1979, 171–73, traces the shifts in Aristophanes' position; cf. David 1984, 17.

[9] The play probably dates from around 392 B.C., though in fact the year of performance is not known; no *didaskaliai* survive and one is forced to make inferences from the internal evidence and *scholia*. It would have at least been performed before the death of Thrasybulus in 389. 392 is frequently suggested (Gelzer 1970, 1406; Dover 1972, 190) though 393 (Ussher 1973, xx–xxv) and 391 (Carrière 1979, 177–82; Barry 1942, 8; Sommerstein 1980a, 3 n. 20) are certainly possible. For further see Moraux 1952, 327; Jacoby 1954, Suppl. B, comm. on 328 F 149, n. 25; Funke 1980, 168–71. Anti 1947, 226–8, suggests it was performed at the Lenaea, but this is speculative.

[10] Beloch 1884, 113, 123–4; Bengston 1960, 259; Mossé 1973, 12–17; Botsford and Robinson 1956, 267, speak of a "disintegration of society" in fourth-century Greece.

[11] Funke 1980; de Ste. Croix 1981, 291–92; Strauss 1986; Lévy 1976a; Garner 1987, 131–43; Sinclair 1988, 16–17, 43. Yet this oversimplifies: Strauss 1986, 3, 178, is less enthusiastic about the restored democracy than are Funke or Lévy; see Todd 1987, 32–49.

[12] Kaibel 1896, 982, sees Athens in the *Ecclesiazusae* as the "gloomy background of a poor city"; Wilamowitz 1927, 203, 215; Murray 1933, 181, speaks of the "years of discouragement"; Flashar 1967, 154; Gelzer 1970, 1495; Schwinge 1977, 61; Saxonhouse 1980, 76–79; Zimmermann 1983, 72, 74–5; Bertelli 1983, 252; David 1984, 3–20; Sommerstein 1984a, 315; Reckford 1987, 252.

part, to establish that public cohesion in Athens had not disintegrated and that, despite the growth of "individualism" in the fourth century, the ideal of loyalty to the *polis* still remained a powerful force.

Our point of departure must be the defeat at the hands of the Spartans in 404 B.C.; not only did Sparta strip Athens of her empire and maritime resources but it expedited the installation of the oligarchic Thirty and the dissolution of the democracy. In the ensuing reign of terror some 1,500 citizens were put to death, for political or private reasons, and the property of many was illegally confiscated.[13] Lysias, speaking for himself in his twelfth speech (403 B.C.), and the speaker of Lysias 13 (ca. 399 B.C.) both bore witness to the criminal and despotic behavior of the Thirty.[14]

Paradoxically, however, the Thirty only enhanced the stature of the democracy once it was restored in 403: such were the excesses of the oligarchs that the rule of the *dêmos*, though attacked for its unreliability and vagaries in the fifth century, now by comparison shone forth as a beacon of stability and justice, even offering amnesty to collaborators of the Thirty.[15] By the 390's, in any event, the Athenian democrats were securely reentrenched and would not face internal strife comparable to that of 404/3; oligarchy, in fact, remained so thoroughly discredited that it would only be an external threat, Macedon, that would topple the rule of the *dêmos* much later in the fourth century. Tensions of course existed—the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*[16] sketches the strains (in matters of foreign affairs at least) among (a) the ambitious radical democrats Cephalus and Epicrates, (b) the wealthy, and (c) the moderates Thrasybulus, Aesimus and Anytus. The amnesty, moreover, was not always easy to keep, as Lysias' clients and the execution of Socrates demonstrate, but the picture we have is one of relative political harmony at Athens in this period. In general the view expressed about the amnesty in the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*, if somewhat exaggerated, seems to have been widespread: "On this occasion, it seems, the Athenians reacted

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[13] Aristotle *Athenaion Politeia* [=*AP*] 34–38, especially 35.4 on their lawlessness, further chronicled in Xenophon *Hellenica* 2.3; Diodorus Siculus 14.1–6; Isocates 7.66; see Strauss 1986, 55.

[14] Others killed by the Thirty are heard of in Lysias 2.61–62, 10.4, 18.5.

[15] Compare, for example, the attacks on the whims of the *dêmos* in *Knights* 1340–54, Cleon's attack on the *dêmos* at Thucydides 3.38, pseudo-Xenophon *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.5, with Isocrates 8.108: "Have we not, all of us, because of the madness of the Thirty, become greater enthusiasts for democracy...?" See Garner 1987, 131–36; Sinclair 1988, 16–17. On the amnesty: *AP* 39–40; Xenophon *Hellenica* 2.4.38–43.

[16] *Hell. Oxy.* 1.2-3, 2.2; Bruce 1967, 52–4, 56–7.

to their previous misfortunes, both individually and together, better and more public-spiritedly than anyone else at the time."[17]

Damage to the economy, however, was a more corrosive legacy of the defeat and last years of the Peloponnesian War. Nothing would replace the lucrative income of the Delian League that had supported Athens in the fifth century.[18] Furthermore the Spartan occupation of Decelea during the war had both effectively stopped silver mining at Laurium and raised havoc with agricultural production in Attica—a boon to grain importers perhaps, but devastating to farmers. Light industry in the city may have escaped the fate of farming and mining in the country, but even prosperous weapons manufacturers are likely to have suffered in the wake of events such as the desertion of 20,000 slaves and the freeing of those who rowed at Arginusae.[19] Some evidence is anecdotal: Xenophon mentions a certain Eutherus who had apparently risen to the relatively well-off hoplite class, only to sink back to the thete class after the war and earn his living by working with his hands.[20] The poor may have been hit hard and the middle class experienced a decline in living, as both the *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* attest.

Nevertheless, one should not overemphasize the difficulties. Actual suffering would have been unevenly distributed and overall some two thirds of the citizenry still owned their own land.[21] The fiscal health of the state at the time of the *Ecclesiazusae* may have been rather good. The accounts of poverty usually cited from Lysias—the "slender revenue of the state" (21.13), the pressure for repayment of foreign debts, the decay of the shipping sheds, and the necessity of confiscation of private property by the state (30.21)—are earlier (403/2 B.C. for repayment, 399/98 B.C. for confiscation) than the *Ecclesiazusae*, and important events intervened. Although Athens had remained docile and compliant to Sparta's wishes in foreign policy for several years after 403, she began to show greater independence with the encouragement of the democrats Cephalus and Epicrates and by 395 the moderate Thrasybulus made a clean break from

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[17] 40.3, tr. Rhodes 1984; cf. Rhodes 1981, 420, on *AP*'s biases. Even Plato, though he would eventually become disillusioned, approved of the restraint of the democracy upon its restoration in 403: *Epistle* 7.325b. But Strauss 1986, 3, warns against turning the Athenians into saints. See now Loening 1987 for a study of the reconciliation agreements.

[18] Mossé 1973, 15; de Ste. Croix 1981, 293; David 1984, 19.

[19] Thucydides 7.27.5 says the slaves were largely skilled workers; on Arginusae see *Frogs* 693–4 and Diodorus Siculus 13.97.1; Strauss 1986, 42–54.

[20] *Memorabilia* 2.8.1–3; see Mossé 1973, 14; Strauss 1986, 56.

[21] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his hypothesis to Lysias 34, says that in 403 only 5,000 citizens did not own land (out of ca. 15–20,000); see Strauss 1986, 43 n. 7.

Sparta by forming an alliance with Thebes and Corinth against Sparta.[22] The victory at Cnidus in 394 of Conon's Persian-supported fleet over the Spartans and his acquisition of funds for the construction of the Long Walls by 393—employing many craftsmen and masons—buoyed Athenian hopes for regaining political and military power.[23] The democratic politicians were now able to offer payment for attendance at the assembly (the *misthos ekklêsiastikos*). Agyrrhius instituted a one-obol fee after 403, Heracleides raised it to two obols in the 390's, and Agyrrhius raised it again to three obols (the *triôbolon*) shortly before the *Ecclesiazusae* was produced.[24]

There must therefore have been cause for optimism in 393, with new wealth made available and Sparta seeking a negotiated peace, though by late 392 this optimism would have been tempered by military reverses.[25] Andocides complains that "the walls give nothing to eat" (3.36). We do not know whether the play was performed before or after the disappointments of 392; obviously knowledge of this would better allow us to appreciate the temper of the city. But the setbacks of late 392 were not those of 404/3; although the city was not back at the peak of its power, neither was it completely without ambition or confidence. We know that Athens would not regain her fifth-century hegemony, but Athenians at the time of the adventures of the Corinthian War may not have been so sure.

2. The *Ecclesiazusae* as Satire of Politicians or Programs

Predictably many of these political issues insinuate their way into the *Ecclesiazusae*: we hear of Corinthians (199), the fleet (198), politicians (173–203, 393–426) and poverty (90–92, 408–421), yet it must be said that these allusions are of little help in unmasking the playwright's political allegiances. Identification of the purpose and target of Aristophanes' satire is considerably more difficult for this play than for many others because the *parabasis*, which conventionally hints at an underlying political agenda, is lacking in the *Ecclesiazusae*.

Moreover, the names of prominent politicians only appear sporadically:

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[22] *Hell. Oxy.* 1.2–2.2; see Bruce 1967, 51–61; Hamilton 1979, 173–78.

[23] *Hellenica* 4.3.11–12, 4.8.9–10; Diodorus Siculus 14.85.3.

[24] *AP* 41.3; see also David 1984, 29–32. Evidently the payment was limited to the first so many who arrived on time: *Eccl.* 289–92, 381–82; see Rhodes 1979, 307. Political competition between Agyrrhius and Heracleides may have been a factor in this: Sinclair 1988, 116–17.

[25] *Hellenica* 4.4.19; Strauss 1986, 150; David 1984, 34.

Thrasybulus, the moderate democrat, seems to be spoken of with sincere approval by Praxagora (*Eccl.* 203) and elsewhere she makes jibes at the more radical democrats Agyrrhius (102, 184), Cephalus (248) and Epicrates (71); the chorus praises the good old days of Myronides (304), an associate of Pericles and *stratêgos* ca. 458–9 B.C.—a democrat but of a much earlier generation. Praxagora's remarks about the Corinthians and the launching of a fleet (193–204) are of little use in the absence of a secure date for the play.[26] But the *Ecclesiazusae* is plainly not "about" foreign policy or any one politician[27] in the way that the *Lysistrata* was about the war or the *Knights* about Cleon.

It is tempting to identify Aristophanes' views with those of the sympathetic protagonist: Praxagora's support of Thrasybulus seems reasonable and she eloquently deplores the injustices she sees at Athens, yet Praxagora also advocates, with the chorus' approval, something even more revolutionary than any radical democrat could have contrived: the transfer of power to women (*gynaikokratia*) and communistic sharing of property (*koinônia*). That Praxagora's views are indeed Aristophanes' and that he seriously intended the audience to contemplate these or similar measures has been argued recently by Sommerstein, who entertains the idea that after the Peloponnesian War Aristophanes underwent a genuine conversion in political beliefs and was prepared to support "left-wing" reforms such as the redistribution of wealth. After all, at the very end of the *Ecclesiazusae* Praxagora's new social order is not repudiated but evidently emerges triumphant. A straightforward reading of the play, then, is that it promotes communism as a solution to Athens' problems which, after all, stem from poverty and the consequent selfishness. However exaggerated Praxagora's communism may be, Aristophanes believes it is a step in the right direction; something must be done to make the citizenry attend to the interests of the community.[28]

This reading of the play as sympathetic to the notion of redistribution of wealth has never been widely shared, and once the straightforward reading is rejected, an "irony hunt"[29] begins. Many critics, who still view

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[26] Praxagora—and Aristophanes—think Athens and her politicians are overly dependent on the alliance against Sparta, suggests Barry 1942, 70ff.; see also Webster 1970, 23–31.

[27] Notwithstanding the interesting argument for Agyrrhius in Hess 1963. The fourth-century democracy *may* have bridled attacks on politicians, which would explain the relative paucity of attacks: Carrière 1979, 46.

[28] See Sommerstein 1984a, 314–333 and Schwinge 1977, 63. Carrière 1979, 170, while not seeing an outright conversion in Aristophanes' political views, observes that oligarchs are increasingly vulnerable to criticism in the later stage of Aristophanes' career.

[29] Booth 1983, 369, cf. also 300–308.

the *Ecclesiazusae* as a satire on selfishness, think its primary aim is to attack communism: the apparent success of Praxagora's new political program gives way to failure, according to this "ironical" interpretation; once in place, communism, which imposes unnatural demands and makes unrealistic promises, is exposed as a swindle. When Chremes surrenders his belongings to the city (730–876), his neighbor, a "Dissident,"[30] refusing to follow suit, calls Chremes a fool and does not hesitate to try to get the free meal offered only to those who have turned in property. He will succeed, according to the ironists, and Chremes is thus exposed as the dupe of a ludicrous system.[31] Another example: at the end of the play Blepyrus, Praxagora's husband,[32] announces to the audience that they are all invited to a banquet—at their own homes (1148)! The invitation is a cruel jest; communism is a hollow fraud. The audience has been startled into a sober recognition of its dangers.[33] Proponents of the ironical interpretation tend to see the *Ecclesiazusae* as an expression of Aristophanes' bitterness and frustration in a time of defeat and poverty.[34]

But they overstate the case. As we have seen, there were indeed economic troubles, but the city had not suffered a collapse and the democracy was quite secure. Moreover, the Greeks in general were not as protective of private property as we are today, and the right of the state to redistribute wealth was much greater.[35] Finally, the ironical school tends to overinterpret the events of the play: it is by no means clear from the text that the Dissident gets a free meal, nor need Blepyrus' invitation to a meal that does not exist be anything more than a joke.[36]

3. Festive, Mythic and Philosophical Interpretations

The view that the *Ecclesiazusae* is intentionally political (whether on the straightforward or ironical reading) must be weighed against other

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[30] I borrow the term from Sommerstein 1984a, 316.

[31] Wilamowitz 1927, 215.

[32] The identification is not settled: see Olson 1987, 161–67, but Blepyrus seems most likely.

[33] Flashar 1967, 158, concluded that the use of such irony is characteristic of Aristophanes' later plays; Wilamowitz 1927, 218; Gelzer 1970, 1501–2.

[34] Wilamowitz 1927, 203, 215, saw the city as "despairing and hopeless" (*verzweifelt... und hoffnungslos*); further Flashar 1967, 154; Gelzer 1970, 1495.

[35] See the remarks of Dover 1972, 199.

[36] Fraenkel 1936, 274, found it highly improbable that any Aristophanic comedy should end in irony; Dover 1972, 199 n. 10, points out that telling the audience to go home is a stock joke, cf. *Lysistrata* 1049–57, 1058–71, 1189–1202, 1203–15. Schmid 1946, 269, attributed Wilamowitz' rejection of this interpretation to the latter's Prussian conservatism, unable to acquiesce in the success of communism! Flashar's article (1967), which in the last two decades has frequently been cited to support the ironic interpretation of the *Ecclesiazusae*, actually gives the play very cursory treatment before passing on to the *Plutus*.

alternatives: for example, the play could be "festive" in the sense that, like Carnival before Lent, its function is to license misrule and overturn the hierarchy of society, and if Aristophanes accomplishes anything in this play it is precisely that: women rule men and the laws of property ownership are suspended. Greek drama was, after all, performed during festivals that suspended everyday routines.[37] Those who adhere to the festive interpretation in its extreme form insist that there is no personal political commitment in Aristophanes and that no attack on a politician can be understood to be anything other than festive mockery.[38] In this view the aim of the *Ecclesiazusae* is Saturnalian release, neither an ironic attack on communism nor even political at all.

This is a hard pill to swallow; to regard these plays as purely festive and deny them serious political significance is to eliminate the satire that many have thought to be an integral part of Aristophanic comedy. Unquestionably the festive moment is one of the most important and enduring features of comic literature. Yet it seems naive to regard Aristophanic comedy as purely "comic"; although comedy and satire are in theory distinct,[39] such critical distinctions are rarely separable in practice and Aristophanes incorporates elements of both into his plays.

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[37] We can speak of the play as festive only in a general sense; it is difficult to associate the play with festivals as closely as, say, Barber did in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959). It seems that the festival of the Skira (where the women made their decision: *Eccl.* 18, 59) involved women dressing up like men, and this is a possible motive for the action of the play; see Vidal-Naquet 1968, 58. Moreover the Skira was "one of the few days of the year when they may leave the seclusion of their women's chambers and form their own organizations to preside over the festival" (Burkert 1985, 230); thus it is a fitting precedent for the play. Yet the promiscuity that the *Ecclesiazusae* sanctions is less suited to the Skira than it is to the Adonia "at which women break out of their closely circumscribed existence in a different way, in a mood of seduction and passion" (Burkert 1985, 245). Detienne calls the Adonia "the very image of female license" (Detienne 1977, 78). There is a close analogy outside of Athens: the women of Argos dressed as men and took up arms to defend their city, and this was commemorated by a festival, the Hybristika, in which men and women exchange clothes (Plutarch *de mulierum virtutibus* 245d–f; Vidal-Naquet 1981, 191–2). Similarly the events that occur at the Pnyx—though not actually staged in the *Ecclesiazusae*—recall the Thesmophoria, which took place on the Pnyx. Finally, the parade of property to the agora (730ff.) may parody the Panathenaic procession (Ussher 1973, 178). No one festival has a claim on this play.

[38] Halliwell 1984a, 6–20; cf. Carrière 1979, 41ff. Zimmermann 1983, thinks that an earlier play such as the *Acharnians* had a valid social function (66) but the *Ecclesiazusae* has lost this (75). A standard exposition of the festive approach is Bakhtin 1968, 196–277; but see now the critiques of Berrong 1986 and Rösler 1986, 25–44.

[39] "Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire 'derides'; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself," Abrams 1971, 153.

The ironical and straightforward readings are at least correct to see in the play some discussion of serious political concern.

The two positions I have just discussed—the "ironical" and the "festive"—have been assumed to be mutually exclusive, yet any heavy-handed resolution in one direction or another should be mistrusted. Surely comedy can deliver a serious message without relying on grim irony, yet be festive without being an ephemeral display of role reversal that lacks any serious political punch.[40] Says Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance*, "The world has always laughed at its tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them. And, consequently, whatever the world has treated seriously belongs to the comic side of things."[41] Extreme "ironical" or "festive" interpretations decide the issue too easily; moreover they do not adequately explain the facts of the play. It is true that Praxagora's plan is unrealistic, and there is no small amount of misrule in the *Ecclesiazusae*, but this alone does not transform the play into an earnest attack on communism.

Still other elements have been thought to diminish the importance of political satire. The motivation for the play's dramatization of *koinônia*, suggest some, is not political but mythical: the idealized life of material wealth, perpetual youth, and easy availability of food are conspicuous elements of the Myth of the Golden Age.[42] The *Ecclesiazusae*, like other plays in the Aristophanic corpus, makes conspicuous use of these motifs. Furthermore, it tends to locate this golden age in the first half of the fifth century and nostalgically idealizes the early democracy (the time of Myronides, for example) as an age of moral superiority. I suspect, however, that though these motifs may ultimately be mythical in source, they do not determine the play's action and cannot be innocent of political significance.[43]

Similarly, the view that the *Ecclesiazusae* is a philosophical satire perhaps

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[40] Schwinge 1975, 180–81, and Reckford 1987, 3–52, strike a better balance.

[41] Similarly Plato *Philebus* 50b: ". . . In mournings and tragedies and comedies, not only in dramas but also in the entire tragedy and comedy of life, and in many other ways, pains are mixed together with pleasures." See Seidensticker 1982, 33.

[42] Auger 1979, 73–5; cf. Carrière 1979, 101. Although the *Ecclesiazusae* may borrow elements from a specifically Hesiodic Golden Age (*Works and Days* 115–202) another source may be the accounts of a legendary period in Athenian society before Cecrops instituted marriage, when women could vote and when sexual unions were at random—so that Athenians were ignorant of the identity of their fathers; cf. Vidal-Naquet 1981, 198–99.

[43] Occasionally the mythic patterns are inconsistent: Auger (1979, 77) notes that within this framework the *Ecclesiazusae* does not present a complete return to the Golden Age but includes several negative aspects, such as a victory of old women over young men—a sterile prospect, to say the least.

misses the main thrust of the play. To be sure, the similarities with Plato's *Republic* are striking:[44] both societies do away with monogamous marriage and allow all men to share all women (*Eccl.* 613–43; cf. *Rep.* 423e, 457c–466d), the city and property is owned by all (590–610; cf. *Rep.* 416b–417b), there will be no lawsuits (657–72; cf. *Rep.* 464d), and both Blepyrus and Glaucon ask how children will recognize their parents (635–50; cf. *Rep.* 461c). Yet, not only are there significant differences between the two systems,[45] the *Republic* was published some twenty years later. We can hardly exclude the possibility that Aristophanes was exposed to these ideas informally: surely the *Symposium* reflects to some degree the realities of intellectual exchange in Athens; such ideas were "in the air."[46] Nor need we look for exclusively philosophical precedents for the communism of property: Spartan society was organized along lines very similar to those in the *Ecclesiazusae*.[47] While we can speak of plausible philosophical sources to draw on, I suggest that the *Ecclesiazusae*, although it raises issues that can legitimately interest philosophers, is more about political behavior than it is about philosophy. The philosophical themes are, I believe, subordinate to political ones.

4. The Satire of the Selfish *Dêmos*

If the *Ecclesiazusae* was designed to satirize philosophers or philosophies, it does a poor job of identifying its targets; it is too rooted in the general concerns of the 390's to be innocently mythic; to read the play as purely "festive" is to overlook its satiric impetus; the satire of any one contemporary politician or policy, however, is at best tangential; it is neither a denunciation of communism nor a particularly ringing defense of it—in fact it is not really "about" communism at all. It is not "about" any of these things, although these approaches all in one way or another constitute valid readings of the play or identify genuine problems. The more useful inquiry, however, is to ask what larger satiric aim these afore-mentioned motives serve, and I suggest that the satiric target of the *Ecclesiazusae* is the selfish behavior of the Athenian *dêmos*. This behavior is in turn intimately related to, and occasionally governed by, the efforts

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[44] On the much-discussed possible connection between Plato and the *Ecclesiazusae* see Adam 1963, 345ff.; and further in Ussher 1973, xv–xx.

[45] Discussed in Foley 1982, 15 n. 33; Saïd 1979, 61; David 1984, 22; Webster 1970, 34.

[46] Dover 1972, 200; Kerferd 1981, 162; Sommerstein 1973, 11; Baldry 1953, 59. Plato was not the only possible source: see Ussher 1973, xix, for Protagoras and Demand 1982, 179–84, for Pythagoras.

[47] Carrière 1979, 97–98; for the utopian elements see further Schwinge 1977, 60–65.

of politicians to induce, through persuasion, obedience and a sense of loyalty to the *polis*.

The underlying question is, therefore, not one of communism *per se* but of human nature. The value for this play of imposing communism on society is that it is an effective device for throwing light on the behavior of the *dêmos* since it brings out the worst and the best in them. In fact utopian thought in general is more valuable as a commentary on human nature than as a realistic guide to political and social organization. The *Ecclesiazusae* ought to be seen in the tradition of other satirical utopias, like More's *Utopia*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or Butler's *Erewhon*, which depict imaginary societies that, in diminishing some of the maladies of the author's own society, magnify others that are all too familiar. These works are not serious proposals for a new social order but are selective weapons against the hypocrisy of the author's contemporaries; one thinks of Swift in particular. Moreover the new Utopia may have merits that contemporary society sorely lacks; if we disdain the utopia for its absurdities, we should have at least something of its virtues.[48] Unquestionably, then, the satire is social as well as political: the *Ecclesiazusae* deals with the effects of economic dislocation on the *dêmos* and with timeless problems of human conduct, yet the events of the play are frequently framed not simply in terms of the economic plight of family or relationships with neighbors (as we find in the *Plutus*) but in terms of the laws of the *polis*: "The *Ecclesiazusae* is shot through with the political consciousness of a citizen," remarks Barry Strauss,[49] and indeed the issues raised here go to the heart of some of the deepest concerns about classical democracy.

That the play is neither an attack on communism *qua* communism nor even on the radical democrats, but instead satirizes the greedy, individualistic attitudes of certain Athenians, has of course been argued before,[50] but without reference to the larger questions of persuasion and without a full appreciation of the extent of which participation in public life remained a powerful ideal and could offset self-interest.

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[48] Frye 1966, 37.

[49] Strauss 1986, 164; though see also David 1984, 29. Konstan 1983, 17, restricts political satire to treatment of party conflicts and specific political programs, and the *Ecclesiazusae* does not meet this standard; I am using it in a broader sense: Eagleton 1983, 194, says, "I mean by the political no more than the way we organize our social life together, and the power relations which this involves."

[50] Foremost is Barry 1942, 38–39. Similarly Parker 1967, 112, sees the play as a satire of the Athenians' vulnerability to crackpot ideas, not of the ideas themselves. My position is close to Sommerstein 1984a, 330–31, who finds selfishness is the target, though he sees communism as the cure, while I see it as a vehicle for dramatic exposition. On their selfishness see also David 1984, 13.

Selfishness is, of course, a salient characteristic of the behavior of conspicuous members of the *dêmos* in the *Ecclesiazusae*, such as Blepyrus and the Dissident. Certainly those who see the play as ironical are correct to point out that the scheme is unrealistic and that disappointments await Praxagora in its implementation. After all, the age-old charge against communism is that it ignores human nature and self-interest. The economic circumstances of the 390's and the decline in living standards can, as we have seen, in part account for this selfishness. There was surely enough of a sense of impoverishment at Athens for Aristophanes to ascribe, with credibility, a degree of miserliness to his characters.

We should, however, exercise caution in drawing conclusions from this inasmuch as many Aristophanic citizens complain about being hard up: Strepsiades is land-rich but deeply in debt;[51] the jurors in the *Wasps* are so concerned about their pay that they neglect the case at hand.[52] We cannot, therefore, discount the possibility that the poverty in the *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* is to some extent a comic pose. Unquestionably a gap between rich and poor was noticeable (*Eccl.* 197–98) and a household relying on the *triôbolon* would have been poorly off.[53] But does Blepyrus' disappointment at losing the assembly fee indicate that he was poor, or that he was a typical old crank? Moreover, the introduction of the new, higher fee may prove that the citizenry was impoverished, but it may also prove that the state was now wealthy enough to support more social spending.[54] Possibly the economic recovery in the mid-390's held out the promise of greater income in the future, which, when citizens might have decided that it was their due to become more prosperous, would trigger more selfishness than would a bleaker outlook of diminished expectations. But this hardly proves that Athens was on the verge of collapse.

Whatever the historical realities, poverty and greed are certainly a given in the fictional world of the *Ecclesiazusae*. The audience sees a woman knitting clothing for her naked children (92) and hears of impoverished people who cannot even afford their own cloak in the winter (415–16, cf. 566). The greediness of the citizens is a recurrent theme in the *Ecclesiazusae*, but may be documented by two incidents: (a) In the play the assembly fee, the *triôbolon*, has degenerated into an incentive to get the Athenians into the assembly. Blepyrus is typical: in his

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51 See Dover 1968b, xxvii, on his status.
52 *Wasps* 695, cf. 300–302.
53 Ehrenberg 1962, 230–31.
54 See Sinclair 1988, 116, on possible interpretations of the rise in assembly pay.

first appearance on stage he gropes for his clothes so he can go to the *ekklêsia* in time to get his *triôbolon* and buy grain, but he is upset when he realizes that he will not get it. (b) In the debate between the dutiful, law-abiding Chremes and the Dissident (730–876), the Dissident disregards the new law that obliges him to surrender his property; he even goes so far as to assert that taking is more patriotic than giving (778).[55]

But rather than proceed (as others have) to inventory the ways in which the *Ecclesiazusae* illustrates selfishness and to conclude that the play is a sketch of the sad days of post-war Athens, we need to give a better account of the outlook and attitudes of Athenians of the time.[56] It is a widely held assumption that the fourth century ushered in a period of "individualism" and the *Ecclesiazusae* has been seen as a harbinger of this. There can be no doubt but that this phenomenon, a gradual trend beginning in the fifth century[57] (indeed, it has been traced to Archilochus) and extending into the Hellenistic period, profoundly affected Greek thought and literature. Though the concept is nebulous, it generally refers to (a) a valuing of one's own private interests over those of the community or *polis*, and it may involve (b) an emphasis on one's own autonomy, will or personality. Several tendencies of the time point in this direction: the emergence of mercenaries, for whom patriotism was no longer the highest virtue and who felt bound to no one country; greater attention to personal friendship;[58] the development of philosophies and religions that were not centered on the *polis*;[59] and of course a new valuation of the *oikos* (household) which can be seen, for example, in the evolution of comedy into the domestic settings of Menander. The ideal enunciated in Pericles' Funeral Oration, that "when the whole state is on the right course it is a better thing for each separate individual (*idiôtês*) than when private interests are satisfied but the state as a whole is going downhill,"[60] and the practice, associated with Myronides (*Eccl.* 304), of attending the assembly without payment, evidently no longer carried as much weight. Blepyrus and the Dissident are obvious specimens of this in the *Ecclesiazusae*. But the phenomenon is complex and some distinctions

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[55] Barry 1942, 38, 50, 53–4.

[56] Furthermore we must be wary of the circularity in using the *Ecclesiazusae* to prove that there was poverty at Athens, and then using poverty at Athens, as if it were an established fact, to interpret the *Ecclesiazusae*.

[57] For example, Goldhill 1987, 69ff., suggests that the "individualism" of a Sophoclean hero would not sit well with the collective civic values of the democracy.

[58] Humphreys 1983, 31–2; for the transfer in emphasis from civic interests to personal emotional awareness see Segal 1962, 134.

[59] Dodds 1951, 242ff.; one might point to the role of Asclepius in the *Plutus*, 627ff.

[60] Thucydides 2.60, tr. Warner.

are in order before we jump to conclusions about the individualism in the play.

Lack of participation in civic affairs is difficult to document, but even those who did go into public life in the fourth century evidently saw it as a more narrowly defined pursuit. In this period becoming a politician was increasingly a matter of professional choice. Even the *stratêgos*, who had earlier held political responsibilities, began to confine himself to military affairs.[61] This professionalism on the part of politicians, incidentally, led to greater reliance on training in rhetoric: the art of persuasion became essential—more so than in the fifth century—for a political career.[62]

Another apparent manifestation of diminished participation in public affairs at the time was apathy. The assembly fee itself has been argued to be an indication of this: it may, as we have seen, have fed greed but was also, according to the *Athenaion Politeia* (41.3), raised to encourage attendance at the assembly in the 390's. Praxagora complains about this too: she rails against the lack of attendance (*Eccl.* 183) and the need for monetary incentive (206–7).[63] This unwillingness to take broad public responsibilities presumably reflected the increasing concern with private affairs that citizens felt.

But Praxagora's complaint about poor attendance may be misleading; other, quite different, reasons may have contributed to her irritation—reasons that call into question easy generalizations about "individualism." The raise of the assembly fee from one to two to three obols, for example, may have been less a factor of apathy than of greater sensitivity to the importance of participation in the assembly in the years after the oligarchy of 404/3, a time in which any absence at all may have seemed dangerous. Thus it may be that expectations were greater, not that attendance was down: the pnyx seems to have been restructured around 400, somewhat increasing its capacity,[64] and it has been argued that attendance actually increased after 400 to as much as 8,000 from (for example) the 5,000 attendance reported in Thucydides (8.72.1).[65]

This would square with what we know to be a common attitude at the time: the conviction that law is the source of stability and continuity in

[61] Higgins 1977, 129; Rhodes 1979, 310–34.

[62] See Hansen 1983, 49, on the *stratêgoi*, 53, on professionalism; see also Mossé 1973, 17. We will return to the question of rhetorical training in the next chapter.

[63] Of course apathy had its advantage for the politicians, who would have been relatively free to maneuver for their own ends: Mossé 1973, 17.

[64] The only question is, by how much was it increased? See Hansen 1976, 130–34; Sinclair 1988, 117, 134. It has, however, been suggested that the reconstruction was initiated not by the restored democracy but by the oligarchy in 404: Krentz 1984, 230–31.

[65] Hansen 1976, 127–30; Rhodes 1981, 491–2.

Athenian society and that obedience to the legal processes of the restored democracy should be put at a premium. The upheavals of the fifth century, especially the lawlessness of the Thirty, had a sobering effect on Athens, engendering in the fourth century a profound shift in attitudes toward law. The legal code, after its reinscription in 403–399, gained a degree of authority and respectability it had never had in the fifth century when the democracy was new. There was a sense in Athens that laws ought to be obeyed for their own sake; the growth of individualism notwithstanding, obedience to the basic legal code became a hallmark of the restored democracy and pervades fourth-century oratory.[66] Obedience to law is of course the central question of the Plato's *Crito*, which surely was written in the mid- to late 390's.[67] Revisions to the constitution at this time ratified what many apparently felt: after 403 laws became more difficult to alter, and rather than allow *ekklêsia* to enact changes a special jury, the *nomothetai*, were empowered with that task. Athenians distinguished more sharply between a decree (ψήφισμα or δεδογμένον), which was approved by the vote of the assembly and was thus ephemeral and temporary, and a law (*nomos*), which was authenticated by the *nomothetai* and regarded as permanent.[68] At the same time the Athenians began to show greater respect for laws that were written; decrees of the assembly were null and void unless they conformed to the written *nomoi*. The *Epitaphios* of Lysias holds that "it was the way of wild beasts to be held subject to one another by force (βίᾳ), but the duty of men to delimit justice by law (νόμῳ), to convince (πεῖσαι) by reason, and to serve those two in act by submitting to the sovereignty of law (νόμου) and the instruction of reason."[69] This was written shortly after 392, and even allowing for rhetorical calculation, must have struck a responsive chord. Finally one might observe that the new respect for the laws led to the idealization of the "ancestral constitution" (*patrios politeia*). In Isocrates it seems to have meant a restoration of the conservative constitution of Solon or Cleisthenes,[70] though elsewhere the phrase may have referred simply to democratic institutions inherited from the past and still in effect.[71] Either

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[66] Garner 1987, 131–43; Sinclair 1988, 68, 72. To be sure, similar notions appear in the fifth century: cf. Thucydides 3.37, 6.18.

[67] Guthrie 1975, 93.

[68] In the period 400–375 inscriptions show many *psêphismata*, but no *nomoi*: Rhodes 1979, 306. Paradoxically this may have contributed to apathy at the assembly, if the assembly was seen as less important than the *nomothetai*.

[69] Lysias 2.19, tr. Lamb 1930, 41. See Guthrie 1971, 111.

[70] Fuks 1953, 8 and 15 n. 44; other fourth-century orators frequently sang praises of Solon too.

[71] Walters 1976, 129–44.

way the point was that Athenians had come to desire the stability that traditional laws would bestow; a constitution of long standing was a valid model for society. Similarly E. Lévy, in his important study of Athenian political thought of the period, sees Athens as abandoning an "ideology of force" (*l'idéologie de la puissance*), which was characteristic of the fifth-century empire and of sophistic justifications of the right of the stronger, and as searching for a new set of shared beliefs. Concern for the laws is part of these new beliefs.[72] In these ways, then, the democracy achieved moderation and continuity after the turbulence of the fifth century.[73]

We should, furthermore, not be quick to assume that in the *Ecclesiazusae*, or in the minds of Athenians in the 390's, private domestic life had pushed aside the life of the *polis*. Of course the spheres of *oikos* and *polis* were each distinct entities, and it is also true that an awareness of their separateness grew in the fourth century,[74] but it would be a mistake to see them as mutually exclusive or in competition with each other. Foley has suggested that in the *Ecclesiazusae* the values of the *oikos*, which emphasize cooperation and sharing, are used to set the *polis* aright.[75] Even in the *Oeconomicus*, written as many as thirty years after the *Ecclesiazusae*,[76] Xenophon is at pains to justify the prosperity of the *oikos* as beneficial to the state and to show that he does not promote the private interests of property holders at the expense of the common good. For example, he discourages the pursuit of "illiberal" mechanical crafts, because they "leave no spare time for attention to one's friends and the city (*polis*) . . . in fact in some states, and especially in those regulated warlike, it is not even lawful for any of the citizens to work at illiberal arts."[77] Thus Xenophon, far from showing exclusive interest in the welfare of the *oikos*, constantly has an eye on the good of the community: *oikonomia* is a model for the rule and the military policies of a king (4.5–25), provides an incentive to defend land (5.7), and can help train an attack on an enemy (5.14). In fact the well-run household is a microcosm of a well-run city; Xenophon, neither consciously private nor antisocial, would eliminate the differences between the *oikos* and the *polis*.[78] This is Praxagora's achievement too: she imposes the structure of the *oikos* on the *polis* in an

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[72] Lévy 1976a, 173–251; though Lévy also sees in the early fourth century the beginnings of indifference to the state.

[73] See Jones 1957, 52; Rhodes 1972, 49–52; Ostwald 1986, 523–24.

[74] Humphreys 1983, 21.

[75] Foley 1982, 1–6, 16–21.

[76] Higgins 1977, 132.

[77] *Oeconomicus* 4.2–3, tr. Marchant 1923, 391. See Murnaghan 1988, 10.

[78] Higgins 1977, 25–30; Murnaghan 1988, 13. For other analogies of household and state see Plato *Meno* 73ab; Aristotle *Politics* 1.2.3 (1252b9–16), 1.3–13 (1253b1–1260b24).

attempt to smooth over and resolve competing interests.[79] The crucial point, therefore, is that although the *oikos* may be a model, Praxagora acts for the benefit of the *polis*, for the public good.

The attitudes of Blepyrus and the Dissident, often thought of as specimens of fourth-century individualism, may be something else. Although both reflect a concern with one's private well-being, they never quite claim to uphold the *oikos* against the *polis*. Blepyrus does not seem to identify himself with the community; more than once we see in him the selfish *senex* of New Comedy. But his lack of engagement in the politics of the day resembles another feature that seems to have been a constant in Athenian politics of this period: quietism (*apragmosynê*).[80] Although he does not show oligarchic leanings, his disengaged manner is that of an *apragmôn*.

Neither is the behavior of the Dissident in the *Ecclesiazusae* the retreat from and indifference to public affairs that the fourth century eventually gave rise to, and his behavior may be less a factor of fourth-century "individualism" than of simple self-interest, which had already found its defenders in the fifth century. Of course people have always acted out of self-interest, and Greeks regularly evaluated aspects of life in terms of gain or advantage. The desire to win honor (*timê*) was a constant feature of public life.[81] But in the late fifth century the writings and lectures of the sophists found new justifications for such actions, ranging from relatively enlightened philosophical formulations (Protagoras, Democritus and Antiphon)[82] to the crudely selfish (Callicles, Thrasymachus)[83] who are characterized by a lack of restraint, even by *erôs*.[84] In the *Ecclesiazusae* the rationalizations the Dissident gives to justify his actions remind us of this strain in Greek thought, especially in his contempt for what others think (*Eccl.* 860–64).

Let me recapitulate my point here: although the selfish behavior of several characters in the play is a conspicuous target for satire, their behavior is part of a larger set of tensions. On the one hand we find greed, selfishness, apathy, concern for the *oikos*, quietism and individual-

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[79] Foley 1982, 14–21, sees them as mutually reinforcing; Saïd 1979, 61, concludes that the *polis* is obliterated, not aided.
[80] Lateiner 1982, 1–12; Carter 1986, 99–186.
[81] Dover 1974, 226–29; Garner 1987, 16–17; Strauss 1986, 31–36.
[82] Nill 1985; Guthrie 1971, 55–84, 107–113.
[83] Guthrie 1971, 84–107.
[84] Cf. the unrestrained appetites of Callicles at *Gorgias* 491e–492d and his vulnerability to the *erôs* of Demos 481d–e.

ism (none of these entirely fourth-century phenomena); on the other hand we also see genuine concern for the *polis*, participation in politics, and obedience to law and democracy. Lateiner rightly points out that there would come a time when a speaker would "find it necessary to apologize for advancing the common weal," but that time had not yet come in the 390's.[85] The ideal of Periclean Athens, that the welfare of the state should supersede that of the private citizen (*idiôtês*), is still very much alive. Says Lateiner, "The slim historical evidence for a comprehensive revulsion from politics (e.g. Plato's *Seventh Epistle*) is generally tendentious and does not seem to find support in the political history and prosopography of Athens in the years between 430 and 380 B.C."[86] The forces of public-spiritedness and conciliation (represented in the *Ecclesiazusae* by Praxagora and Chremes) are at least as strong as those of private individualism and there are good reasons for the audience to recognize this, however entertaining selfish pretensions are to watch. The attitude of the audience is, after all, what I am interested in here. I assume that the goal of Aristophanic comedy was not only to arouse laughter, but also to encourage protest or at least reconsideration by the audience of some matter of civic importance.[87] Yet theories which purportedly take the audience' attitude into account in fact have often done so only in a limited or superficial way.[88] Needless to say, there is little that we can know with certainty about the opinions of typical Athenians, but I think the attitudes I have sketched out in the last few pages are crucial points of reference.

I therefore cannot agree with the assumption that at the time of the *Ecclesiazusae* Athenians had lost their sense of community or cohesion. The fact that it was necessary to defend political participation may be a measure of the challenge posed by growing public indifference, but may also be a rejection of the divisiveness of the fifth-century. The ideal of the Athens of Pericles and Myronides remains strong, even if it takes on bolder outlines when set against a background of encroaching individualism—if not of fifth-century quietism or arrogance. If private concerns were growing in importance, there was still a deep reservoir of devotion to the *polis*, one that would not be drained for many decades, and the interest

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[85] Lateiner 1982, 10. One might observe that Lycurgus (*Against Leocrates* 3) is apologizing for a prosecution, always a "meddlesome" undertaking; the speech, moreover, falls some sixty years after the *Ecclesiazusae*.

[86] Lateiner 1982, 3. On the high morale and industriousness of the Athenian democracy in the fourth century see Wood and Wood 1978, 111–13.

[87] Schwinge 1975, 180–83.

[88] See the comments on Iser of Eagleton 1983, 83. Zimmermann 1983, 74, takes at least some account of the likely attitudes of the audience, though he sees a markedly diminished interest in the *polis* at the time of the *Ecclesiazusae*.

of the *Ecclesiazusae* is in the tension between them. Aristophanes, far from writing an escapist comedy, is concerned with exposing and attempting to reconcile these contradictory motivations.[89] And, as we shall see, the persuasive power of women is one tool for bridging them. Indeed, the male speakers at the meeting of the assembly are singled out for particular ridicule (*Eccl.* 395–421); women, by contrast, set a better standard for active participation in the democracy.

B) *Women*

Since the initiative in the *Ecclesiazusae* belongs to the women, a few comments about them here will clarify issues for later chapters. The fictional Athens of the play is governed by women, which is a striking departure from reality, where male domination was the rule. Citizen women were not allowed to participate in political activity and were kept under far greater protection and confinement than were non-citizen women.[90] Perhaps this domination can be traced to a fear of women as irrational, a source of disorder in the state,[91] though the view that women were somehow closer to nature, untamed, or unstable is hardly peculiar to Greek thought.[92] Yet a more practical end was also important: since the sexual activity of married women was limited to conceiving legitimate offspring, any suspicion of adultery cast doubt on the legitimacy of her children. The cuckolded husband of Lysias 1 complains that when a wife has been seduced, it is unclear whether the children "belong to husbands or adulterers" (1.33); Blepyrus' suspicions about Praxagora's absence focus on just this (*Eccl.* 520–25). Men, of course, could have sexual relations with anyone they wished—slaves, courtesans, concubines, boys—provided only that they did not do so with the wives of other citizens.[93] Confined to the *oikos* women understandably were kept busy with household affairs: preparation of food, spinning wool. This confinement may have been oppressive, with the women treated simply as objects, subordinate both socially and sexually,[94] though we also find images of domestic happiness.[95]

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[89] It has been argued recently that even Menander's *Dyskolus*, presumably belonging to a genre that provided escapist entertainment, deals with contemporary political problems: Wiles 1984, 170–80.

[90] Gould 1980, 40, 46–48.

[91] Foley 1981, 134.

[92] Ortner 1974.

[93] Pomeroy 1975, 86–92; Foucault 1985, 146.

[94] Dover 1974, 95–98; Keuls 1985, 98–152.

[95] Lysias 1.7 shows an (initially) happy marriage; she is a good housekeeper (οἰκονόμος δεινή); see Gould 1980, 50.

Our immediate concern, however, is less with historical realities than it is with fictional and dramatic representations of women, created and acted by men. Although female protagonists are common enough in tragedy, we only have two in Old Comedy, Lysistrata and Praxagora, and would like to be better informed about the traditions from which they spring.[96] The *Thesmophoriazusae* also parades self-assured women about, yet has no one female protagonist. Of course female characters appear on stage in all of Aristophanes' plays, though frequently they are of negligible importance or even treated merely as sex-objects,[97] and seen in this light Lysistrata and Praxagora, humanized and sympathetic as they are, represent an improvement in the portrayal of women in comedy. If there are parallels for this in Old Comedy they lurk behind the titles of lost plays such as *Women Tyrant* (*Tyrannis*) and *Women on Campaign* (*Stratiodes*), which presumably give some political or military initiative to women.[98] But the evidence that we have points to Aristophanes as the creator of strong heroines in comedy. Of course he may have depended on purely literary sources from other genres: Aristophanes was impressed by the power of Euripidean heroines (as the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs* indicate), and perhaps from them recognized the value of humanized, psychologically deeper female characters.[99] By turning to women he was able to reject the corruption of the male world; because of their exclusion from politics, women cannot be held responsible for political or social ills.[100] Their sudden prominence may reflect his desire, in the darker moments of the Peloponnesian War, to find a symbol for peace and fertility in women, marriage and domestic life.[101]

Whatever the ultimate source of these female protagonists, domestic life plays an important role in the *Ecclesiazusae*. Since wives were confined to the *oikos* it was natural that men would associate the two and since, as we have already noted, the *Ecclesiazusae* witnesses the transformation of the *polis* into an *oikos*, it is only fitting that women be the agents of this. They will do the cooking and produce clothing (*Eccl.* 654); public buildings will be used for dining (*Eccl.* 684–86); and Praxagora even proposes that they tear down the walls between the houses so that the city

[96] For fragmentary evidence on women elsewhere in Old Comedy see Tschiedel 1984, 29–49; Henry 1985, 13–17, 28–31; Henderson 1987a, xxviii and n. 4; Dillon 1987, 100–104; Taaffe 1987, 176–84.

[97] Henry 1985, 28–30. Even the *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae* repeat unflattering stereotypes about women, for example, that they are overly fond of wine or sex.

[98] Henderson 1987a, xxxii n. 8; Webster 1970, 10.

[99] Tschiedel 1984, 44–5.

[100] Lévy 1976b, 110–11.

[101] Dillon 1987, 102.

will literally become one dwelling (οἴκησις, 674).[102] The purpose, of course, is not to promote the *oikos* at the expense of the *polis*, but to restore the health and harmony of the *polis*.[103] The analogy between governance of the state and the household was, as we have seen, a natural one, and the women of the *Ecclesiazusae*, in a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, impose the values of the *oikos* (female cooperation and sharing) on the *polis* (male competitiveness) which of course results in communism. Women are thus the agents of the balance between the *oikos* and the *polis* that Xenophon described (see above, p. 16).

Yet the fact that Lysistrata and Praxagora take over the *polis* completely is something we can find no sure precedent for in the comic tradition. Although their initiative may echo a serious call, for which other evidence has been lost, to emancipate women, the question we should be more concerned with is determining what significance we should attribute to these fictional representations of women. Praxagora and the women at the assembly are not (I assume) meant to be historical persons;[104] they are projections of Aristophanes' imagination. The disorder and subversion of hierarchy brought about by women in these plays might be a realization of the male nightmare of the power of unstable and irrational women—Aristotle, after all, warned that the danger of indulging women was that they would rule the city and cause mischief.[105] But in Aristophanes this need not be so alarming; some reversal of social order is to be expected in comedy, where subversion may ultimately serve to renew society.

Let us turn, then, to examine the changing circumstances of women in the early fourth century; in this period a reevaluation of the role of women seems to have been under discussion. Our evidence is as usual appallingly weak and all conclusions subject to qualification, but a few observations can be made. The social upheavals in Athens during the Peloponnesian War must have affected the lives of women: with the absence or death of men in war the female–male ratio inevitably rose and women probably abandoned their seclusion to perform tasks earlier accomplished by

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[102] Foley 1982, 14–16; Saïd 1979, 45–49.

[103] Foley 1982, 4–6, 18–21. Traditional Greek stories about the rule of women commonly show that it is the women who ensure the continuity of the population: Vidal-Naquet 1981, 196.

[104] Although there is the possibility that Lysistrata is inspired by the priestess Lysimache (Lewis 1955, Henderson 1987a, xxxviii–xl), even she must be dealt with as a fictional character.

[105] *Politics* 2.9.5–10 (1269b12–40); cf. 5.11.11 (1313b32); see Saxonhouse 1986, 413–16.

men;[106] the widow at *Thesmophoriazusae* 443–58 who is forced to sell goods in the streets is quite articulate on this point and the old women in the *Ecclesiazusae* may represent such widows after twenty years.[107] Literary and philosophical circles (a minority view, to be sure) may have, in a city relatively empty of men and full of women (if the *Lysistrata* bears any relation to reality), begun to reexamine the role and rights of women in society.[108] Or it may have been a factor of the creeping growth in men's minds of the importance of the *oikos* and domestic life, in which women loomed large. But there are hints that the exclusion of respectable women from male culture was less than complete as the fifth century gave way to the fourth; some opportunities for education and participation in intellectual life may have existed. One can adduce Lysistrata and Praxagora, the report that two women dressed as men and attended Plato's Academy,[109] and the importance given by Plato to Diotima (*Symposium*) and Aspasia (*Menexenus*)—about whom more will be said in the next chapter. The wisdom and eloquence of these women tell us nothing about the actual status of women in Athens, and no tangible improvement in the lives of women is recorded; all that survives are the representations and speculations recorded by men in literature and philosophy. But their mere existence indicates that there was a qualitative change in the degree to which men took women seriously as thinking and feeling human beings.

The treatment of women in art confirms this. Depictions of women in funerary and votive reliefs were increasingly frequent in the fourth century, possibly in recognition of a greater role in public life.[110] Representations of women show a female body that is more appealing and humanized; in fact it is at this time that the female nude emerges in sculpture: Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Cnidus, of the mid-fourth century, is the most famous example. The appearance of the nude evidently reflects a more open acknowledgement of women's erotic appeal—the model for Praxiteles' statue was, after all, said to have been his mistress.[111] Boardman sees "a deliberate sensuality in the carving of the statues of

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[106] Pomeroy 1975, 119.
[107] Henderson 1987b, 128.
[108] Wender 1973, 83–5; Keuls 1985, 402–3.
[109] Diogenes Laertius 3.46; Lefkowitz 1986, 144.
[110] Ridgway 1987, 405, 409.
[111] Pliny *Naturalis Historiae* 36.20; Athenaeus 13.591a; Robertson 1975, 390–94; Pomeroy 1975, 145–46; Clark 1956, 72–75. On the occurrence of scenes of tenderness or romance in vase painting see Sutton 1980, 108. Less respectable women, such as prostitutes, had been the subjects of paintings for some time: see Keuls 1985, 153–203. I am indebted to William Mierse (unpublished) for many of these points.

women" in this time.[112] As Otto Brendel has put it, from the late fifth century and into the fourth it was a main concern of Greek artists to give a visual account of man as a "sentient being."[113] Moreover, "femininization" seems to have crossed into the portrayal of men as well in this time: K.J. Dover says, "It is arguable that whereas down to the mid-fifth century women were commonly assimilated to men in vase-painting, thereafter men were increasingly assimilated to women."[114] The same may be said of at least some male sculpture: Clark notes the feminine delicacy of the Apollo Sauroktonos, whose boyish head is indistinguishable from that of a girl.[115]

The attractiveness of the female was, it is true, already apparent to the Trojan elders in the *Iliad* who watched the approach of Helen and murmured in approval (3.154–55). Yet it appears that the male view at the time of the *Ecclesiazusae* was one of even greater sensitivity to the erotic appeal and seductive qualities of women.

C) *The shape of the plot*

Praxagora, in addition to being one of only two female protagonists in extant Aristophanes, is unusual in another sense: she vanishes well before the play is over. While it is true that Lysistrata leaves—at least she will speak no more—after line 1187, with 134 lines left in the play,[116] we last hear of Praxagora at 724, when she states clearly that, having launched her new social order, she is leaving the stage, with 460 lines and some of the play's most important episodes remaining. Of course Euelpides leaves at *Birds* 846 and Xanthias at *Frogs* 813, presumably in order to allow the actors who play their parts to return as other characters,[117] but neither of these two is a protagonist or "comic hero," to use Whitman's term. It is understandable that Whitman, given his interest, did not even attempt to discuss the *Ecclesiazusae*: "It is hard to read any play, except possibly the *Ecclesiazusae*, and feel that it is falling apart."[118] The scenes that follow Praxagora's departure are the logical consequences of her innovations,

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[112] Boardman 1973, 132.

[113] Brendel 1970, 37.

[114] Dover 1978, 71; he further speculates that in the fourth century effeminate appearance in boys or youths may have stimulated homosexual desire more often than they would have done a century and a half earlier (73).

[115] Clark 1956, 46. The Hermes of Olympia has a relaxed languor that "just stops short of effeminacy": Boardman 1973, 134.

[116] Henderson 1987a, 206–7.

[117] Sommerstein 1987, 253.

[118] Whitman 1964, 9.

yet she neither controls them in the way Peisetaerus does in the *Birds* nor even presides over them as does Dionysus in the *Frogs*, and their episodic nature seems to some to undermine unity and a sense of direction, and dissipate the comic potential of the play.

The flaws found in the construction of the play have been attributed to the supposedly failing powers of Aristophanes himself. He has been described as "ageing or overtired";[119] even more radical is Dover's suggestion that the playwright suffered a stroke in this period.[120] It is true that for the last twenty or so years of Aristophanes' life (404–384?) we have only two plays and at the most five more titles—seven plays in all, compared with approximately 34 in the twenty years from *Banqueters* to *Frogs*.[121] Yet, given the loss of so many plays and the paucity of hard evidence on Aristophanes' life and career, biographical interpretations should be viewed with suspicion: this decrease in artistic productivity may be more apparent than real.

Of course there can be no doubt that Aristophanes' last two surviving plays, the *Ecclesiazusae* and the *Plutus*, mark new directions in the evolution of ancient comedy. Even in antiquity scholars recognized that there were innovations in the *Plutus* (its lack of choral song, for example),[122] and that in the *Cocalus* Aristophanes introduced a rape and recognition, which became stock motifs in New Comedy.[123] Yet we should also remember that in the eyes of ancient scholars the crucial shift from Old to Middle Comedy occurred somewhat later, in the 370's.[124] The *Ecclesiazusae* is therefore best seen as essentially a product of Old Comedy, and I assume a basic continuity in the Aristophanic corpus from the fifth century into the early fourth. In fact the formal breaks in the action of the *Ecclesiazusae* (when all actors are offstage and the chorus seems to have no song), which contribute to the sense of an episodic movement, come very close to establishing a five-act play, and this may be a natural outgrowth of practice in all of Aristophanic comedy.[125]

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119 Murray 1933, 181 and 198. Webster 1970, 10, noting the serious and disillusioned expression on the funerary portrait of a comic playwright from the Kerameikos (ca. 380 B.C.), suggests that it is of Aristophanes! Yet he also defends the wit and construction of the *Ecclesiazusae* (1970, 14).

120 Dover 1972, 195 n. 7.

121 Cantarella 1966, 35; for the chronology see Gelzer 1970, 1404–1413.

122 This is mentioned in *Prolegomenon de comoedia* V.24–26 and *Vita Aristophanis* XXVIII.55–6, Koster 1975, 14–15, 135.

123 *Vita* XXVIII.54–5; cf. *Vita* XXIXa.7–8; Koster 1975, 135, 137.

124 Hunter 1984, 5. Aristotle, it might be noted, used these terms somewhat differently, and may have thought of the entire Aristophanic corpus as "Middle" comedy: see Janko 1984, 244–50.

125 Sommerstein 1984b, 139–52.

Whether or not we should expect a tightly unified plot from Aristophanes, and blame him for falling short of this goal in the *Ecclesiazusae*, remains in my mind an open question. Tight plot construction may be essential for tragedy and New Comedy,[126] but it is hardly universal in Old Comedy. Schwinge has argued (in an article defending the inconsistencies of the *Knights*) that it is mistaken to apply to Old Comedy standards of unity that stem from Aristotle (esp. *Poetics* 7–9). Aristotle, argues Schwinge, had little use for Old Comedy and its strong satirical element since in the Aristotelian view Old Comedy was merely an early stage of the development that would lead to New Comedy. Yet we ought to accept Old Comedy as a complete genre in its own right, one which is designed to arouse laughter and provoke insight through satire, and in this case the response of the audience, not unity of plot, becomes the primary criterion. The *Knights*, suggests Schwinge, presents a series of negative and positive models in its various episodes that are meant to engage the viewer.[127] The notion that comedy should engage the audience in a more active way than tragedy has also been advanced by Taplin; unlike tragedy, which demands silence, comedy invites response and interruption.[128] This is not to say that a comedy can merely be a series of unconnected skits, but that it is a theatrical event and its coherence can derive from its comic inspiration, not from a tightly constructed plot.[129]

The *Ecclesiazusae* certainly has such an inspiration, and it may be inappropriate to criticize it for not following the conventions of tragedy and later fourth-century comedy. On the other hand, even the *Knights* is able to keep its main characters on stage for most of the play, so even by the standards Aristophanes himself has set the *Ecclesiazusae* is disconcerting. But the looseness must be put in perspective; it is not a fatal flaw, and we can find a thematic continuity, if not unity, arising from its comic inspiration. In any event, whether or not the *Ecclesiazusae* ranks with the acknowledged masterpieces of ancient comedy, judgements of quality should not become a substitute for literary analysis.

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[126] Then again, Plautus' plays are more episodic than Terence's.

[127] Schwinge 1975, 177–199; so too McLeish 1980, 127, sees Aristophanic comedy as a series of contests meant to interest the spectator.

[128] Taplin 1986, 173.

[129] Similarly Harriott 1986, 115: "The establishment of unity as supreme desideratum in Aristophanic drama is mistaken."

CHAPTER TWO

PEITHO, *EROS*, AND POLITICS

A) Peithô *in classical Athens*

Since the behavior of the *dêmos* is determined in part by the success (or failure) of politicians to win consent, we examine in this chapter the means by which that consent is won and therefore turn to the domains of rhetoric and persuasion. I also include here seduction because, as I will explain below, aspects of political activity were portrayed in terms of *erôs*. These were, of course, vitally important in the intellectual and cultural life of the late fifth and early fourth centuries; tragedy, Thucydides, Plato and Aristophanes all drew on them in various ways. We will see, moreover, that they will help us understand the role of women in the *Ecclesiazusae*. The map to this territory is not simple, but since it has been drawn in detail elsewhere,[1] a selective account will be sufficient here.

Rhetoric was a constant presence in Greek literature, from Homer onwards, yet it was not until the fifth century that Greek orators consciously began to develop rhetorical strategies and devices. Gorgias, who if not the "inventor" of rhetoric did a good deal to further its cause, propounded "the most radical confession of faith in *peithô* known to us from Greece"[2] and a glance at his *Encomium of Helen*, which is a virtual compendium of ideas about verbal efficacy, is the shortest path to an understanding of this creed. The purpose of the *Encomium of Helen* was to exonerate Helen from moral blame for eloping with Paris; Gorgias argues that she was a victim, overwhelmed by stronger forces, including the gods, brute force (*bia*), erotic desire (*erôs*) and *peithô*. Gorgias allots considerable space (*Helen* 8–14) to an anatomy of the sources and components of *peithô*, many of which had traditionally been in the province of poetry; Gorgias now claims them for rhetoric and persuasive speech in general. That poetry could enlist the power of magic[3] or be psychologically therapeutic[4] was commonplace: one thinks, for example, of the nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus* who assures Phaedra that enchanting words (θελκτήριοι λόγοι,

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[1] Norden 1923, Kennedy 1963, Laín Entralgo 1970, Detienne 1973, de Romilly 1973 and 1975, Solmsen 1975, Marsh 1979, Buxton 1982, Walsh 1984.

[2] Buxton 1982, 53; I have used MacDowell's edition of the *Encomium of Helen* (1982).

[3] de Romilly 1973 and 1975, 4; Kahn 1978, 136–38; Marsh 1979, 26.

[4] On the "therapy" of the word see Laín Entralgo 1970.

478) can act as a drug (φάρμακον) against her illness, which is *erôs*; similarly Gorgias says that by means of incantatory speech (ἐπῳδή) the hearer can be charmed (θέλγειν, *Helen* 10) and he explicitly compares the effect of speech to a drug (φάρμακον, *Helen* 14).[5] Both the magical and therapeutic aspects imply, to varying degrees, that words alone can alter the psychology of others as if by tangibly manipulating or stamping (τυποῦσθαι, 13) them.[6] Persuasion is consequently as potent as compulsion (ἀνάγκη) with brute force (βία, *Helen* 12).[7] A different kind of efficacy stems from the suitability of words for deception (*apatê*, *dolos*). This notion was so widespread in Greek thought that it cannot be adequately illustrated here.[8] But Gorgias presses this to its logical conclusion by suggesting that words are inherently deceptive. Distinguishing true speech from false is impossible since men must rely not on absolute knowledge but on belief (δόξα), which is a slippery thing (*Helen* 11).[9] Yet this is its strength: "A single speech pleases and persuades a large crowd because written with skill, not spoken with truth" (*Helen* 13).

Gorgias indirectly compared the power of persuasion to the power of *erôs* inasmuch as both are irresistible (*Helen* 15–19). Curiously, though, Gorgias emphasizes the role of sight—the vision of the beloved, a stock motif in Greek literature to be sure—rather than verbal enticement. Yet the idea that speech was an agent of erotic seduction is as old as Homer. Hera seduced Zeus in the *Iliad* by means of Aphrodite's girdle, which had on it "whispered endearments" (ὀαριστὺς πάρφασις, 14.216–17), seductive words that help her overcome Zeus;[10] Calypso charmed Odysseus with "soft and wheedling words" (μαλακοῖσι καὶ αἱμυλίοισι λόγοισι θέλγει, *Od.* 1.56–7); Pandora too was endowed with αἱμύλιοι λόγοι (*Works and Days*, 78) as part of her erotic attractiveness.[11]

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[5] Plutarch tells us that in his earlier years the orator Antiphon advertised that he could "cure by words (διὰ λόγων θεραπεύειν) those who were in distress; and by asking questions and finding out the causes of their condition he consoled those in trouble," but eventually "thinking that this art was unworthy of him, he turned to rhetoric": *Moralia* 833c–d, tr. Fowler 1936, 351.

[6] On the psychology implicit in this see Segal 1962.

[7] "Speech is a great master" (δυνάστης, *Helen* 8); cf. Euripides' *Hecuba* (816–17) where *peithô* is a τύραννος.

[8] See Pucci 1975, 29–55 for a discussion of Hesiod. Pindar criticized Homer and Hesiod for their deceptions: see Marsh 1979, 120; Walsh 1984, 38–9, 45; Detienne 1967, 75–7. For the deceptiveness and verbal trickery of Helen in *Odyssey* 4 see Bergen 1980, 526.

[9] Verdenius 1981, 116–128, suggests Gorgias meant speech could never be true, but see MacDowell 1982, 13–14. Gorgias' *Palamedes* and *On Being and Not-being* also address the problem of the inability of language to convey thoughts: see further in Guthrie 1971, 180–1; Kerferd 1981, 81.

[10] Buxton 1982, 36; Marsh 1979, 76; Laín Entralgo 1970, 63.

[11] Marsh 1979, 76; Walsh 1984, 14. See Brown and Coulter 1971, 419 n. 24 for αἱμύλιος in connection with the trickster and seduction.

Two observations before returning to *peithô* proper: seductive speech frequently entails an element of deception;[12] moreover, the powers of both *erôs* and *apatê* are consistently found together in women.[13]

The *Encomium of Helen* codified what the Greeks already knew: that *peithô* is woven into—or weaves together—threads of many colors, and the semantic range of the verb πείθειν tends to confirm this. Usually translated as "persuade" or "prevail upon," Buxton has suggested that a more precise meaning is "to get someone to acquiesce in some belief or action,"[14] thus emphasizing that the object is to bring about a psychological change in the person whose acquiescence is sought. The aim of the verb πείθειν is, after all, to get someone to πείθεσθαι, that is, "to obey", "to believe," or "to trust." Or, as Aristotle says of the court-room trial, the goal of persuasion is to "put the judge into a certain frame of mind" (*Rhetoric* 1.1.9, 1354b20).

Although "persuasion" may suggest to us the winning over of an opponent through reasoned and logical argument, it actually works (as Gorgias knew) through illogical, emotional, and even dishonest means.[15] This has been reemphasized by modern students of rhetoric, who realize that the domain of argumentation is not in the self-evident proof of logicians, but elsewhere; since it develops in terms of its audience, a rhetorical strategy must include personal and affective means (imagination, passion, suggestion).[16] Moreover, Buxton's suggested definition also leaves open the possibility that words, though primary, need not be the only means available. Euripides was thus not quite on the mark when he said in the *Frogs*, "Peitho has no other shrine except the word (λόγος, 1391)." Accordingly many of the means included in the entry in LSJ for πείθειν are affective and non-verbal, as the context requires: "bribing with money or "tempting" with food, enticements that play on one's desires.[17]

Of the 114 times Aristophanes uses the words πειθώ, πείθειν, πείθεσθαι

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[12] For later poets, πάρφασις could be something closer to "distortion" than "endearments": Walsh 1984, 34, 40; cf. also Kahn 1978, 145.

[13] Euripides *Hecuba* 884: "When we use δόλος we are hard to combat." Buxton 1982, 161, notes the link between women and deceit in myth; see also Marsh 1979, 75; Zeitlin 1981, 206 and n. 40; Knox 1977, 202 and n. 30.

[14] Buxton 1982, 49.

[15] Thus LSJ have for πείθειν definitions A.I "by fair means" and A.II "in bad sense."

[16] See Perelman 1982, 1–20, who also (17–18) distinguishes "convincing" from "persuading" in that the former secures intellectual, rational agreement, while the latter subjectively induces adherence. Yet Perelman seems unaware of the extent of "affective" *peithô* in Greek thought before Aristotle's description of the ethical and emotional appeals (*Rhetoric* 2. 1–17).

[17] LSJ s.v. πείθειν II.2, 3.

and compounds, a large number are in neutral, unmarked contexts, especially in the middle/passive ("believe"). They can describe the effect of deception (e.g. *Peace* 622) or bribery (*Wasps* 101); many instances imply persuasion with verbal argument, public or private, and some are even quite explicit about it: Dicaeopolis "conquers with words (λόγοις) and persuades the people" (δῆμον, *Acharnians* 626). We should include here one other means of persuasion: "seducing" with erotic allure, and although this denotation does not appear in LSJ, it is clear that in several erotic contexts this is the closest and best English equivalent. In one of its very first appearances in extant Greek πείθειν refers to the attempted seduction of Bellerophon by Anteia (Iliad 6.162). In Lysias 1 we hear of a seduction that is described as πείθειν (1.20, 32, 33) and "consenting to sexual relations" is surely what the women of the *Lysistrata* say they will refuse to their husbands (πείθεσθαι 223–4).[18]

The erotic dimension of *peithô* can be substantiated by the role in cult, art and literature of its personification, the goddess Peitho.[19] A cult of Peitho seems to have existed in Athens: Pausanias (1.22.3) mentions a temple of Aphrodite Pandemos and Peitho; numismatic evidence and inscriptions offer confirmation.[20] Pausanias also mentions a statue of Peitho in the shrine of Aphrodite at Megara, along with statues of Eros, Himeros ("Desire"), Pothos ("Longing"), and Praxis.[21] An early fifth-century skyphos in Boston (490–80 B.C.) depicts the seductive power of Peitho: holding a flower (a symbol of her erotic function), she accompanies Aphrodite in supervising the abduction of Helen by Paris.[22] Peitho was frequently associated with seduction in literature: in Hesiod (*Works and Days* 73) Peitho assisted in adorning Pandora (who, we recall, was endowed with αἱμύλιοι λόγοι, 78),[23] and, as Pindar tells it, Jason persuaded Medea to come to Greece by means of Peitho and incantations.[24]

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[18] *Odyssey* 9.33: Circe would like to πείθειν Odysseus; likewise Menrander *Dyskolos* 209; *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.14, 4.10. Of course seduction can still be accomplished by verbal means: Alcibiades is smitten by Socrates' *logoi* at *Symposium* 215d. See Gross 1985, 16–17, and Carson 1986, 49–50 and 108 on *peithô* and *erôs*.

[19] On the personified Peitho, see in general Hamdorf 1964, 63–4.

[20] Simon 1970, 11–14; Sokolowski 1969, 73–74; Beschi 1967/68, 517–28.

[21] Inscriptions also give "Peitho" as an epithet for Aphrodite; Praxis refers to sexual intercourse, suggests Buxton 1982, 32, comparing Euripides' use of πρᾶξις at *Hippolytus* 1004.

[22] For this and a fuller discussion of the personified Peitho in Greek art see Shapiro 1986, 4–23. Consult also Burn 1987, 17, 33, 37, 39.

[23] See West 1978, 162, for further associations of Peitho, Aphrodite and seduction.

[24] *Pythian* 4.219, which again confirms a link between magic and persuasion; so too Prometheus says that the ἐπαοιδαί of πειθῶ will not bewitch him (Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 172–173); cf. Buxton 1982, 40.

It should be clear from the above that *peithô* could as easily mean "seduction" in an erotic context as it meant "persuasion" in a rhetorical or political situation, but before turning to its political application, two other aspects of *peithô* need to be explored in more detail: its relationship to deception (*apatê* or *dolos*) and forceful violence (*bia*). We have already seen that *peithô* had its "bad sense" in that it could mislead as well as persuade. The Greeks themselves fully appreciated that *peithô* was an "ambiguous friend,"[25] potentially good, but often morally dubious and at worst actually destructive.

The personified goddess Peitho had already been indirectly associated with deception when Hesiod called Pandora (whom Peitho had helped to adorn) a *dolos* (*Works and Days* 83). Lysistrata's invocation of Peitho (*Lys.* 203), in the course of spurring on the women in their scheme to seize the Acropolis and end the war with a sex strike, is at once political, sexual, and deceptive. (Once again, we observe that women are associated with this deceptive side of *peithô*.)

The relationship between *peithô* and *bia* is more complicated and was viewed with some ambivalence. *Peithô* ordinarily implies verbal argumentation, not violent, physical force (*bia*), and in fact the two are usually regarded as mutually exclusive.[26] The *Philoctetes* serves as an example: in that play deceit, force and persuasion (in that order) are weighed as distinct methods of retrieving Philoctetes' bow. The play ends by affirming *peithô*, but only where it is used on a moral, trusting basis. The legal scholar James Boyd White sees in the play a paradigm for building communal and social consensus, which can only be won with a *peithô* that is trustworthy. Persuasion establishes shared values and motives, and builds common ground for a community.[27]

Yet elsewhere similarities between *peithô* and *bia* become apparent. The chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* seems to link the two when, describing Paris' abduction of Helen, they say, "Baneful Peitho uses force" (βιᾶται δ' ἁ τάλαινα πειθώ, 385), thus likening the effects of *peithô* to those of *bia*.[28] Similarly Thucydides describes the demagogue Cleon as both βιαιότατος

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[25] Adcock 1948, 13. Connor 1971, 107: "Language is power and its development, like any new technology, is morally ambiguous."

[26] "Opposed categories," says Buxton 1982, 58–62. Democritus (fr. 181DK) preferred persuasion to force; Guthrie 1971, 179. They are explicitly contrasted at *Republic* 548b7. If πείθειν referred to seduction, βιάζεσθαι was rape: Cyrus urges Araspas to "seduce a woman" (πείθειν γυναῖκα) not to "seize her forcibly"(βιάζεσθαι, Xenophon *Cyropaedeia* 6.1.23); we find the same contrast at Plutarch *Moralia* 792f2.

[27] White 1985, 3–27; see further Garvie 1972, 213–226 and Buxton 1982, 118–132.

[28] Winnington-Ingram 1983, 199–202.

and πιθανώτατος (3.36.6).[29] Here *bia* is a metaphor for the power of *peithô*: when Cleon speaks he is above all πιθανώτατος, yet the effect of his *peithô* is akin to *bia*: not physical, but forceful nonetheless.[30] Even in the *Philoctetes* this overlap was apparent: the boundaries of the three stages (deceit, force, persuasion) are not clearly defined. In that tragedy Neoptolemus' first forays in the direction of persuasion actually begin with the language of compulsion (δεῖ, 915; ἀνάγκη, 922). Odysseus, on the other hand, uses the language of *peithô* (πειστέον, 994) to describe force, and Phitoctetes, in turn, realizes that he is under compulsion, as if he were a slave (δοῦλος, 995).[31]

B) Peithô, *democracy and sophistic*

"Rhetoric is *par excellence* the democratic art"[32] and persuasion took on a special significance at Athens in the fifth century B.C. Along with the growth of the democratic institutions—the strengthening of the powers of the popular assembly and the opening to all citizens of paid jury service—there also arose, *pari passu*, greater need and expectation of persuasive public speech, and it is understandable that the cult of Peitho came to have a special place in Athenian public life in the fifth and fourth centuries.[33] The *prytaneia*, on which Aristophanes served in the 390's, probably sacrificed to Peitho.[34]

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[29] Edmunds 1987, 32 and n. 9.

[30] In other words, *peithô* is the tenor, and *bia* the vehicle. A further example: Themistocles is said by Herodotus (8.111) to have told the Andrians, whom he was about to besiege, that the Athenians had the support of two powerful deities, Peitho and Ananke. One wonders whether Buxton, 42, is right to see these as alternatives: could *peithô* not be "an offer they couldn't refuse," a euphemism for brute force? (Here *bia* is the tenor, *peithô* is the vehicle.)

[31] Garvie 1972, 221; cf. Plato *Philebus* 58a–b where Protarchus heard Gorgias say that "the art of persuasion was greatly superior to all others, for it subjugated all things not by violence but by willing submission" (tr. Hackforth 1972, 120).

[32] Guthrie 1971, 179.

[33] Kennedy 1963, 27. Of course persuasive speech is useful even in pre-democratic times: the king in Hesiod's *Theogony* solves disputes "with his sure eloquence" (ἀσφαλέως ἀγορεύειν, 86), and redresses wrongs "winning consent with gentle words" (μαλακοῖσι παραιφάμενοι ἐπέεσσιν, 90). The latter phrase recalls the language of seduction: the participle παραιφάμενοι is related to the noun πάρφασις, which described the alluring whispers of Aphrodite's girdle; again the erotic insinuates its way into the political. See Pucci 1975, 43; Walsh 1984, 34; Marsh 1979, 76.

[34] Demosthenes *Prooemia* 54; Buxton 1982, 34; Buxton also suggests (35–6) that the prominence of the cult of Peitho in Argos was due to that city's democratic tradition. On Aristophanes' service: Kirchner 1901, Vol. I, Nr. 2090 cites *IG* ii[2] 1740, accepted by Gelzer 1970, 1396. An inscription at the theater designates a seat for a priestess of Peitho, or Aphrodite Peitho: III.i.351.

Individual politicians were well aware of and took advantage of the power of *peithô* in politics. The effect is well summed up by Eupolis' description of Pericles' ability to "bewitch" his hearers.[35] Although Pericles may have been the outstanding orator of his day he was by no means so alone in his ability to charm: Plato reports that Thrasymachus—said to have written a speech delivered in the *ekklêsia* and familiar to us from the *Republic*—could produce anger in an audience, and then soothe it by "charming with incantations."[36] Studies of modern political orators use similar terms: the source for the authority of leaders such as Hitler, Huey Long and Roosevelt was "magical" rather than rational;[37] a charismatic demagogue is in danger of becoming an actor by "playing on the emotions" of listeners.[38] Public speaking became essential for a political career, and it was natural to think of men such as Pericles and Thrasymachus as *rhêtores*, a term which, although literally meaning "orators," was essentially synonymous with "politicians." As Connor has put it, "The politicians of this period were necessarily thought of as ῥήτορες, for they led by their eloquence."[39] The word ῥήτωρ first appeared in Attic inscriptions around 445 B.C.[40] and by the fourth century the status and title of *rhêtôr* had become semi-official; moreover, as we have seen (p. 14), by the fourth century training in rhetoric became even more indispensable for a political career.

It is in this context that we should place the sophists, who travelled throughout Greece and taught rhetoric to political aspirants. Gorgias, with whom we now chiefly associate such rhetorical devices as isocolon, word-play, and antithesis, taught by assigning to his students practice speeches, such as the *Encomium of Helen*.[41] Thrasymachus was another sophist: in the *Banqueters* Aristophanes associated him with the teaching of neologisms,[42] and he may also have been the first to cultivate in prose some of the rules of poetry, such as rhythm and the avoidance of hiatus.[43]

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[35] Eupolis *Demoi*, fr. 94K = 102*PCG*, quoted above, p. x; see the discussion in Buxton 1982, 12–13, and Kassel and Austin 1986, 353–55.

[36] *Phaedrus* 267c; see de Romilly 1975, 6; Kennedy 1963, 54–6; cf. also Guthrie 1971, 295.

[37] Bell 1965, 402.

[38] Schweitzer 1984, 36.

[39] Connor 1971, 116.

[40] Shortly after democrats had begun to make their mark through persuasive speech? The word "democracy" first appears as the name "Demokrates" on an inscription from the 460's: Davies 1971, 359–60.

[41] For Gorgias as the *heuretês* ("inventor") of the rhetorical figures see Norden 1923, 16ff.

[42] Fr. 198K = *PCG* 205; see Cassio 1977, 32-36, 48.

[43] de Romilly 1975, 9; see Norden 1923, 41–3; Finley 1939, 39–40; Kennedy 1963, 33, 69–70.

The political consequences of this power should be obvious: the sophist, in effect, taught the *rhêtôr* ways to manipulate and impose his will on society—skills to which the Thrasymachus of the *Republic*, who saw rule of the weaker by the stronger as a fundamental principle in society (cf. *Republic* 338c), would surely have been receptive. The sophist Antiphon also recognized that persuasion gives an unfair advantage to an aggressor, rendering law (*nomos*) inadequate.[44]

The *Oresteia*, produced at the very beginning of the radical democracy (458 B.C.), reflects the growing importance of *peithô*. In fact—to simplify an intricate process—the trilogy can be said to encompass a progression from a *peithô* that is deceitful and violent to one that produces a trusting reconciliation. The chorus of the *Agamemnon* credited the abduction of Helen by Paris to "Baneful Peitho, irresistible child of Ruin" (385–6). Not only does Peitho here do the dark work of uncurbed *erôs*,[45] but significantly Peitho is described as the daughter of *Atê* (Ruin). In Hesiod Peitho had been the daughter of Ocean and Tethys (*Theogony* 349); thus Aeschylus has contrived a new genealogy to emphasize Peitho's destructiveness.[46] A different note is sounded in the *Eumenides*: words will not undermine justice but reinforce it. In the end Athena persuades the Furies to acquiesce in the non-violent process of the court:

> ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν ἁγνόν ἐστί σοι Πειθοῦς σέβας,
> γλώσσης ἐμῆς μείλιγμα καὶ θελκτήριον,
> σὺ δ' οὖν μένοις ἄν.
>
> If you revere the sacred power of *peithô*, the delight (μείλιγμα) and charm (θελκτήριον) of my tongue, then you might stay with us.
>
> *Eumenides* 885–87

The powers of the magical (θελκτήριον) and the erotic (μείλιγμα) aspects of *peitho*[47] are demonstrated by Athena's ability to change the Furies' mood: although bitterly opposed to Athena's judgement at first, they eventually accept it and look forward to their honorable responsibility of

[44] DK 44A, especially column 6; see the discussions of Moulton 1972, 329–66; Nill 1985, 63.

[45] Marsh 1979, 77; cf. Buxton 1982, 105.

[46] See Fraenkel for genealogies (1950, Vol. II, p. 201). By contrast, Peitho and Pothos are daughters of Aphrodite in the *Suppliants* (1038–1042), where Peitho serves the dramatic purpose of being the power that resolves the Danaids' dilemma.

[47] For the magical power of words in this passage see Walsh 1984, 78. On the erotic aspect implicit in μείλιγμα see Buxton 1982, 111.

administering justice in Athens. The *Oresteia* thus exhibits confidence in the power of *peithô* for debate and reconciliation.[48]

The influence of sophistic rhetoric can be detected in Euripides' *Trojan Women*—and perhaps the entire Trojan Trilogy, if Scodel's reconstruction and interpretation are correct.[49] The Trilogy, of which the *Alexander* and *Palamedes* survive only in fragments, seems to have been structured around a series of *agônes*, or formal debates, between leading characters. These *agônes* provide an opportunity for characters to display a variety of oratorical skills; in fact the speeches in the *Trojan Women* seem to verge on rhetorical display, exhibited for their own sake. Yet these are natural places for contemporary ideas to manifest themselves. Helen and Hecuba, for example, debate human responsibility: Helen claims to have been compelled by Aphrodite to follow Paris (914–965, cf. *Encomium of Helen* 6), and though she may be logical her defense is a facile and sinister one, undermined by Hecuba, who insists that Helen must accept responsibility for her actions (969–1032).[50] In spite of himself Menelaus is persuaded—seduced, we might say—to spare Helen's life, though more brutal and arbitrary treatment is in store for the Trojan women and children. Moral standards have little meaning in the world of the *Trojan Women*, but the play is a natural vehicle for sophistic ideas and rhetorical structures.[51]

Inevitably Plato's attack on sophistic thought entailed criticism of rhetoric; already in the *Apology* we find truth and the ability to speak persuasively in opposition to one another (17d–18e). The *Gorgias* (ca. 388 B.C.?) is largely devoted to proving (against Gorgias' view that it was an innocent or at least neutral teaching) that rhetoric is a tool of injustice—even in the hands of a leader like Pericles it corrupted the Athenians (515c–516d). Later, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato conceded that it was acceptable if used to lead the soul to truth (261a).[52] And persuasion is at least preferable to force, which in the *Republic* is the mark of the degenerate timocratic state (548b);[53] this is anticipated by the *Crito*, where Socrates had contrasted compulsion and deceit with the winning of consent (52e).

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[48] On the achievement of a constructive *peithô* consult Gagarin 1976, 85. See also Kane 1986, 99–124, and Simon 1970, 14, on *peithô* and the *Oresteia*.

[49] A thorough survey of persuasion in Euripides, though it would serve to underscore the importance of it in the late fifth century, would needlessly prolong this chapter. Consult Lupher 1980; Pepe 1967, 246–257; Buxton 1982, 147–186.

[59] Barlow 1986, 205–8.

[51] Scodel 1980, 93–100, 105–7.

[52] Morrow 1953, 236–37; Warman 1983, 49–50.

[53] Warman 1983, 50. Plato's desire in the *Republic* to prove the importance of law and obedience to it explains his emphasis on education: Morrow 1953, 234.

Other fourth-century views are considerably more positive than Plato's. For Isocrates, who opened a school at Athens around 393 B.C., rhetorical training could be a useful, moral force, and had a place in the general education of a man in public life. Among public men "those who give most study to the art of words are the best of the statesmen who come before you on the rostrum."[54] Aristotle, who gives a far more comprehensive account than did Plato of rhetoric and the psychology of persuasion, understood that it could be put to immoral uses, but pointed out that this is true of all useful things.[55]

C) *Women and* peithô

A long tradition in Greek thought and literature attributed powers of language and speech to women and it is only natural that they should be associated with *peithô*, if it includes both persuasion and seduction, and can overlap with deception. I have already mentioned several women with verbal powers: Calypso, Pandora, Athena[56] and Helen.[57] This need not be simply a matter of mythical tradition: in Lysias 1 the cuckolded husband emphasizes the role played by the persuasive and tricky speech of his wife.[58] So potent was the perception of this power in a woman that, at Athens, if it could be proven that a will had been altered by a man persuaded by a woman, that will could be legally invalidated.[59]

Systematic training of women in rhetoric was rare. Although citizen women were probably not given a formal education in rhetoric outside of the home, non-citizens—metics, courtesans (ἑταῖραι), even slaves—were not under the restrictions applied to citizens and had more access to training. Such at least seems to have been the case with Aspasia, Pericles' Milesian-born mistress, who is said to have had considerable abilities as a teacher of rhetoric. Evidence about her life is scanty (we do not even know when she died, although we hear nothing of her after 428)[60] and much of it is fiction, but for my purposes what is important is not historical

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[54] *Antidosis* 15.231, tr. Norlin 1929, 313. In general see Kennedy 1963, 174–203; Marrou 1956, 79–81.

[55] *Rhetoric* 1.1.13, 1355 bl-7. See Kennedy 1963, 82–87, on the evolution of Aristotle's ideas on rhetoric.

[56] This power can, at least in the case of Athena, be related to *mêtis*, "cunning intelligence": Bergren 1983, 73; Detienne and Vernant 1978, 177–258.

[57] She has verbal powers in *Odyssey* 4 and the *Trojan Women* though curiously, as we have seen, she is silent in Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*. Likewise in the *Iliad* she is passive, merely an object of or projection of male desires: Loraux 1984, 13.

[58] Garner 1987, 87.

[59] Isaeus 2.19, 6.9, [Demosthenes] 46.14; Garner 1987, 87.

[60] See further Davies 1971, 458.

truth but the literary persona that emerged in the early fourth century. Plato's *Menexenus* (235e–36b, 249d–e) is perhaps the best-known account of this tradition: Socrates recites a speech which he says he heard Aspasia deliver and praises her abilities as an instructor, claiming that she even surpasses Antiphon of Rhamnous, whom Thucydides considered the finest orator of his day (8.68.1). Athenaeus (5.219b–d) also says that she was Socrates' teacher in rhetoric (διδάσκαλος τῶν ῥητορικῶν λόγων). Socrates tells Menexenus that it was Aspasia who turned Pericles into the political success that he was.[61] Philostratus adds: "It is said that Aspasia the Milesian sharpened Pericles' tongue after the fashion of Gorgias"; evidently she taught Gorgianic rhetoric.[62] After Pericles' death she married Lysicles and, by living with him, trained her new and politically inept husband to become a good *rhêtôr* too.[63] We also hear that she would have given a speech of her own in public, although that was illegal.[64] In fact so discouraged were women from speaking in public that in Lysias 34.11–18 a man quotes, almost verbatim, a long account of what his mother would say if she could speak in court!

Furthermore, formal rhetoric came to be thought of in terms appropriate to women. Plato (*Gorgias* 465b) described rhetoric as akin to cosmetics, and this view of stylistic adornment has a long history. Cicero said that the simple style in rhetoric was like a woman without trappings, whose tresses have a natural wave (*Orator* 23.78–9). Dionysius of Halicarnassus thought overblown Asiatic rhetoric was "vulgar and disgusting," like an insensate harlot (ἑταῖρα) who has claimed control of the household of an honest wife.[65] Quintilian compared the excesses of rhetoric to depilatories, curling irons and make-up—it is, in any event, effeminate; a simple, manly style is free of such ornament.[66] Thus women

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[61] See also Callias *Pedetai* *PCG*21 = 15K (=schol. *Menex.* 235e); Henry 1985, 15, sees this not as a compliment but as a conventional attack on a politician (Pericles) by associating him with a courtesan (Aspasia). See also Wender 1973, 83–85.

[62] 73rd letter to Julia Domna; Ehlers 1966, 58, 6. In the *Menexenus* Socrates has evidently been taught to memorize specimens of oratory, in Gorgianic fashion: Kennedy 1963, 53.

[63] Syriac pseudo-Plutarch; Ehlers 1966, 76–7.

[64] Syriac pseudo-Plutarch; Ehlers 1966, 77, sums up: Aspasia is "nicht nur *rhêtorikê*, sondern umfassender als Meisterin der Politika." On Aspasia and Diotima see now Halperin 1989. A curse inscription on a lead tablet from Attica has unkind words for Aspasia, Socrates and their "lawyers" or legal helpers (σύνδικοι): *IG* III.iii.106; see McClees 1920, 30, and Garner 1987, 84. Whether these are our Aspasia and Socrates seems unprovable.

[65] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, "On Ancient Orators" 1.1, tr. Usher 1974, 5–6.

[66] Quintilian 2.5.12; 5.12.18–20; 8.prooemium.19–20; 8.3.6–7. See Wiseman 1979, 3–8; Lichtenstein 1987, 77–87.

persuade with rhetoric as easily as they disguise themselves with cosmetics.

D) Erôs *and politics in classical Athens*

Just as the persuasive power of rhetoric was seen to be akin to seduction, so too, by extension, all political activities—grasping for power, ruling, patriotism, winning votes—were frequently considered erotic in character by the Greeks.

Herodotus described the ambition of a tyrant in language more appropriate for sexual desire than for politics. Deioces, for example, who wanted to become king of the Medes, was said to be "enamored of tyranny" (ἐρασθεὶς τυραννίδος, 1.96.2). When Periander's daughter begged Lycophron to take over Corinth, she reminded him that "power is a slippery thing, and has never lacked lovers (ἐρασταί) to woo it" (3.53.4).[67] Thucydides tells us that there were those in Athens who regarded Alcibiades as aiming at tyranny (τυραννίδος ἐπιθυμοῦντι, 6.15.4); he similarly portrayed Alcibiades as "desiring" (ἐπιθυμῶν, 6.15.2) to lead the Athenian armada against Syracuse in 415 B.C.

Thucydides extended this characterization to the Athenian people themselves. During their deliberations about the Sicilian expedition Nicias had tried to dissuade them from their "desire to sail" (τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν τοῦ πλοῦ, 6.24.2), yet he only succeeded in whetting their appetites, whereupon a "passion fell upon them" (ἔρως ἐνέπεσε, 6.24.3), a "longing" (πόθος) seized the young men, and, owing to an "excessive desire for more" (τῶν πλειονῶν ἐπιθυμία, 6.24.4) none opposed this ultimately disastrous plan.[68]

Arrowsmith has suggested that a mythic archetype of this desire for imperial conquest is Helen, the seductress and cause of the Trojan War—the "ship-destroying, man-destroying, city-destroying" Helen of the *Agamemnon* (690). The erotic image persisted throughout the fifth century and is still potent in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (405 B.C.) when Agamemnon can only account for the expedition against Troy by saying,

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[67] See Cornford 1907, 207 and Neil 1901 on *Knights* 1341, who suggests that in prose, if political, ἐρᾶν is generally used of tyrants' ambitions. Cf. Plato *Republic* 521b4: "lovers of governing" (ἐρασταὶ τοῦ ἄρχειν) and *Republic* 573d on the *erôs* of a tyrant.

[68] See Arrowsmith 1973, 134–5: it should be noted that the phrase τῶν πλειονῶν ἐπιθυμία is ambiguous and others translate it as "the desire of the majority": on this consult now Connor 1984, 168 n. 25. On Thucydides' use of *erôs* see Cornford 1907, 201–220 and Forde 1986, 433–445. Compare also the phrase "lovers of wars" (ἐραστὰ πολέμων, Euripides *Heracleidae* 377) cited in Halperin 1986, 71 n. 30, who documents the further extension of the language of *erôs* in Platonic philosophy.

"Some strange Aphrodite has crazed the whole Greek army with a passion to sail at once..." (1264–5).[69] In this way Euripides associates the Aphrodite who sent Paris to Helen with the Aphrodite who sent the Greeks to Troy.

The vocabulary of *erôs* also described less destructive motivations in politics. Herodotus evokes something akin to patriotism when he tells of the longing (πόθος) of the Phocaeans to return to their homeland after they had abandoned it (1.165.3);[70] similarly in the *Eumenides* Athena tells the chorus they will "come to love this country" (γῆς τῆσδ' ἐρασθήσεσθε, 852). Dicaeopolis says in the *Acharnians* that he is lusting (ἐρῶν, 32) for peace and longing (ποθῶν) for the countryside.[71] Perhaps the most striking use of the language of *erôs* is Pericles' appeal in his funeral oration that the Athenians become *erastai* of their *polis* (Thucydides 2.43.1).[72] Whether Pericles is telling them to love the city's power, or the city itself, is uncertain,[73] but if the former, the phrase is perhaps not so very far removed from the use of ἐρᾶν for a tyrant's ambition.

In any event, it should be stated at this juncture that this erotic language is an expression of something quite fundamental: in its intensity it goes beyond simple patriotism and ordinary piety. Pericles, in appealing to *erôs*, seems to be conceding that he must appeal to the citizens on an individual level. Evidently their collective patriotism and civic spirit are by themselves not sufficient. Although in Book 6 Thucydides may depict *erôs* as something affecting the entire people, it is an impulse that is aroused on a personal level; it is through *erôs* that Pericles can attempt to channel individual impulses, usually hostile to restraint, in desirable directions and to attach these individuals to something outside themselves. Similarly in the Platonic dialogues the arousal of philosophical reflection draws on the same sources which animate man's sexual nature; an erotic desire, though springing from the self, can succeed in shattering one's self-interest.[74] Pericles' exhortation that they become

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[69] Arrowsmith 1973, 133–4, links the *Agamemnon* and the *Iphigeneia at Aulis* passages.

[70] See Ehrenberg 1947, 65.

[71] Cf. Arrowsmith 1973, 123. Other instances of love of one's country: Euripides *Phoenissae* 359 (πατρίδος ἐρᾶν), *Erechtheus* frag. 360.54 (φιλεῖν), the female chorus of the *Lysistrata* claims to have "patriotic (φιλόπολις) virtue" (547); Henderson 1987, 138, collects other related words. See Konstan 1985, 176–185, on φιλία in Euripides' *Electra.* Similarly Sitalces is φιλαθήναιος and an ἐραστής of the Athenians (*Acharnians* 143)—though in a diplomatic context φιλία can be more ritualized than affective: see Edmunds 1987, 22; Strauss 1986, 20–23, 174.

[72] In his commentary on this passage Gomme 1956, 136, sees Pericles himself as the likely source for the language.

[73] Immerwahr 1973, 29; Forde 1986, 439 n. 13.

[74] Brown and Coulter 1971, 415; Halperin 1986, 76.

erastai would therefore be an attempt to harness the increasingly volatile individualism and self-interest that Athens seems to have engendered at the end of the fifth century.[75]

We have, of course, seen that individualism and self-interest were tendencies that were becoming known (p. 13–19). This assertion of self-interest can be connected with the language of *erôs* in (again) the ambition of the tyrant: it was the tyrant (thought many Greeks) who had achieved real freedom—and had gained unlimited opportunities for indulging in sensual pleasures.[76] Thus in asking the Athenians to be *erastai* of the city Pericles offers them the enjoyment of such an indulgence, but at the same time directs this emotional energy toward a political and patriotic end. This is a civic-mindedness that draws on the energies of sexual desire.

Others followed Pericles in grounding their political appeal in *erôs*. It seems that the demagogue Cleon borrowed this figure of speech—newly coined by Pericles, apparently—and turned it to his own ends in claiming that he was an *erastês* of the *dêmos*. The tactic may have been part of a new turn that Athenian politics seems to have taken in the 420's: Connor has proposed that Cleon left the *hetaireiai* (political clubs characteristic of Athenian politics) in order to take his case, as a *dêmagôgos*, directly to the *dêmos*. Language that had earlier been reserved almost exclusively for relations with persons was now to be used of relations with the *polis*.[77]

E) Erôs *and politics in Aristophanes*

What follows cannot be a comprehensive survey of the question in the Aristophanic corpus, but will merely indicate that Aristophanes was alert to this new vocabulary of *erôs*, as the *Knights* and *Birds* show.

The *Knights* (424 B.C.) is indebted to the language of *erôs* in its ridicule of Cleon. The play takes place in the household of Demos (the personification of the Athenian people) whose Paphlagonian slave (understood to be Cleon) will stop at nothing to flatter his master. Two other slaves, resentful of this, convince a Sausage-seller, Agoracritus, to challenge Cleon. Although the Sausage-seller initially shows no interest, he is by the time of the play's *agôn* openly attacking Cleon and trying to

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[75] Forde 1986, 439.

[76] Andrews 1963, 25. It was the freedom of the tyrant to indulge his whims—even in matters of *erôs*—that appealed to Callicles. This paves the way for Lévy's "idéologie de la puissance"; Lévy 1976a, 105–7, on Callicles and Thrasymachus, and see above, p. 17.

[77] Connor 1971, 97–100. We might note that the *hetaireiai* themselves depended on personal relationships: Hutter 1978, 25–90.

win Demos' favor. Demos sympathizes with the Sausage-seller, at first calling him *philodêmos* ("friendly to the *dêmos*," 787) although they had only met a moment before (733), yet it is not until 1259, after a long series of flattering and persuasive maneuvers, that Demos fully entrusts himself to the Sausage-seller.

The play operates on several levels. For Newiger the play dramatizes the affinity and interaction between the domestic sphere (*oikos*) and the political sphere (*polis*): on the surface the play is about a master (Demos) and the slave who serves him (the Paphlagonian), but beneath this is a parable about the Athenian people (*dêmos*) and a pandering politician (Cleon).[78] Yet Landfester has suggested that another pattern is woven in: the *Knights* depicts not so much the domestic and political spheres as it does the *sexual* and political spheres.[79] While the sexual and domestic spheres certainly do not preclude one another, stressing the link of the sexual and the political gives a more satisfactory account of the erotic language in the play. A figurative "love of country" may not have seemed unduly strained or improper when Pericles used it, but Aristophanes took it in a literal sense, and, in an Aristophanic *reductio ad absurdum*, portrayed Cleon as a homosexual *erastês* who was attempting to seduce Demos who, in turn, was portrayed as an *erômenos*. "I am in love (φιλῶ) with you, Demos, and I am your ἐραστής," says Cleon (732). Unfortunately for Cleon, the Sausage-seller Agoracritus asserts his claim as an ἀντεραστής ("rival lover"),[80] and competes with Cleon for Demos' attention. In this sense, then, the *Knights* dramatizes the full range of *peithô* in that Cleon is simultaneously trying to seduce and persuade Demos. The dependence of this winning-over on rhetoric appears explicitly at the end of the play when the Sausage-seller Agoracritus, having finally won Demos' favor and having defeated Cleon, points out to Demos how gullible and uncritical he has been:

> πρῶτον μέν, ὁπότ' εἴποι τις ἐν τἠκκλησίᾳ,
> "ὦ Δῆμ' ἐραστής εἰμι σὸς φιλῶ τέ σε
> καὶ κήδομαί σου καὶ προβουλεύω μόνος,"
> τούτοις ὁπότε χρήσαιτό τις προοιμίοις
> ἀνωρταλίζεις κἀκερουτίας.

[78] Newiger 1957, 14.

[79] Landfester 1967, 52–59. Newiger recognized but did not develop the implications of the erotic language.

[80] The vocabulary of homosexual *erôs* will be treated at greater length in Chapter Four. The Knights anticipates *Gorgias* 481de where Callicles is in love with Demos son of Pyrilampes as well as the Athenian *dêmos*; Brown and Coulter 1971, 417 n. 20. Plato calls Alcibiades *dêmerastês* at *Alcibiades* 132a.

> First, whenever someone said in the *ekklêsia*, "Demos, I am your *erastês* and I am in love with you and I care for you and scheme for you, only I. . ."; whenever someone used these overtures (προοίμια) you clapped your wings and tossed your horns.
>
> *Knights* 1340–44

Although much of the play depicts various strategies (including offers of gifts and food) used by Cleon and Agoracritus to win over Demos, it does not lose sight of the principal means of seducing the *dêmos*: flattering speeches which persuade the people to approve the speaker's proposals, and the Sausage-seller's assertion that this frequently occurs in the *ekklêsia* may be a clue to actual rhetorical practice.[81] Thus Aristophanes shows that Pericles' appeal that the Athenians love their city has been twisted and debased by a politician pandering to the citizenry's worst instincts. Moreover, the *Knights* reveals the two aspects of *peithô*: verbal persuasion and sexual seduction. It is as an *anterastês* that Agoracritus wins over Demos. But foolish Demos has chosen his lovers badly and traded one demagogue for another.[82]

Aristophanes again raised the issue of *erôs* in politics in the *Birds* (414 B.C.). After Peisetaerus and Euelpides have built Cloudcuckooland, they discover that (echoing Pericles) their new city has many *erastai* (1279), one of whom is a parricide insisting that he is in love (ἐρᾶν) with the laws of the birds.[83] Similarly, Peisetaerus and Euelpides had been described as *erastai* of the gathering of birds (324; cf. 155–6).[84] Political or civic affiliation is thus expressed in erotic terms, and this matches the mood of contemporary Athenian politics on the eve of the Sicilian expedition in 415 B.C., described by Thucydides in ways I have discussed above.

Eros, Arrowsmith has argued, is a presence throughout the *Birds*: in the parabasis the birds claim Eros as an important ancestor (696) and he is invoked again at the bridal party at the end of the play (1737). Eros and the birds, since they have wings, are able to defy gravity and ascend of their own accord. This property is shared by the phallus, of course, and indeed wings frequently connote the phallus.[85] It is then only predictable

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[81] Certainly the use of the word προοίμια here points to some awareness of conscious rhetorical art: Murphy 1938, 73–4. "Tossing horns" (in the passage quoted) apparently was a hint of sexual approval.

[82] Schwinge 1975, 180–91.

[83] *Birds* 1343, though the line closely resembles 1345 and may be a spurious intrusion; see Dover 1977, 145–57.

[84] Arrowsmith 1973, 130.

[85] Arrowsmith 1973, 130–36, citing *Phaedrus* 252b where Eros is the "winged one" (πτερωτός). Visual depictions graphically confirm the point: Keuls 1985, 79–80. Consult also Carson 1986, 154–64. A phallic bird has even been found in excavations of the agora: Sutton 1980, 112.

that the birds (as well as the winged Euelpides and Peisetaerus) should have political goals that are aggressive and libidinous. What is more, Peisetaerus indirectly attributes this libidinous political aggression to rhetoric by announcing that men are winged with words (1438), so that it is rhetoric that confers sexual and political energy on men and gives them a vehicle for their aspirations. Words can accomplish anything in this play (Whitman suggested they *are* everything); certainly they create the fantasy-city Cloudcuckooland out of thin air.[86]

We can, then, justifiably see Peisetaerus (as his name implies) as an "epiphany of *logos* and *peithô*."[87] One of Peisetaerus' important functions in the play is to persuade the birds to allow him and Euelpides to stay and to convince them that they deserve to rule. This is a process that begins in a pitched battle when the birds attack the two Athenians (343ff.) and ends when the birds declare themselves ready to help (627). If we recall that Peisetaerus called himself an *erastês* we see that (as in the *Knights*) it is the convergence of *erôs* and rhetoric that allows him to accomplish his goals, however morally questionable they may be. Peisetaerus was thus the agent of the birds' and his own imperialistic designs; so too, as Thucydides vividly showed, *peithô* was instrumental in inciting the Athenians' expansionistic desire to conquer Sicily.

It remains to be said that in both *Knights* and *Birds* rhetoric, although it can bring people to a consensus on issues of public importance, is a morally questionable power since it can be a tool of demagoguery and imperialism. Aristophanes never commits himself to a position on the morality of rhetoric, such as that taken by Plato in the *Gorgias*, but perhaps he simply saw it as amoral, a tool that has its dangers and can serve self-interest, but can offer a means for finding common ground, building a civic consensus, and establishing a community. All of these were goals of central importance to fourth-century Athenians.

The *Knights* and *Birds* make particularly explicit the assumptions that link *erôs*, rhetoric, and politics, and that take on a significance which exceeds trite commonplace and lifeless figures of speech. In summary, we have seen several ways in which *erôs*, politics, and *peithô* interact: (a) In a political context, erotic language is used to render an appeal more

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[86] Arrowsmith 1973, 146; Whitman 1964, 171–76. The final choral ode of the *Birds* perhaps confirms this when the chorus calls the Athenians a "belly-blabbing tribe" (1695) and mentions Gorgias in particular (1701).

[87] Arrowsmith 1973, 144; though the spelling and meaning of Peisetaerus' name is not settled, it is clearly related to the stem πειθ—; Sommerstein 1987, 201, sees Peisetaerus, "persuader of comrades," as more appropriate than Peithetaerus or Pisthetaerus, which suggest obedient loyalty; similarly Gelzer 1970, 1461; Marzullo 1970, 181–85.

persuasive or to characterize a political motivation that is unusually compelling. A person may be an *erastês* of tyrannical power, a state or its laws. *Erôs* is a force in human nature, and politics is one outlet for it. (b) The seductiveness of a woman can in part depend on her verbal and rhetorical powers, and this power is essentially that of *peithô*, which she shares with public speakers. (c) The power of *peithô*—whether political or erotic—can have the metaphorical efficacy of *bia*, and *bia* can be euphemistically labelled *peithô*. *Peithô* can encompass *apatê* and *dolos*; they need not be mutually exclusive.

Although not without its dangers (one thinks of the Peitho of the *Agamemnon*, *Trojan Women*, Plato's critique and the *Knights*), persuasion, because of its affective (Aristotle's *Rhetoric*), or even erotic powers (*Birds*), can build civic consensus (*Eumenides*, *Philoctetes*) and win obedience from citizens. In the *Ecclesiazusae* only a few characters exhibit the πλεονεξία ("grasping ambition") that characterized the *Birds*, but the *Ecclesiazusae* exploits political uses of rhetoric and *erôs* in ways that are related to these earlier comedies.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ACTION OF THE PLAY

In the *Ecclesiazusae* Aristophanes dramatizes the tensions and ambiguities that arise from the gap between (a) the sense that the law must be obeyed and (b) private, individualistic self-interest. *Peithô*, because it embraces both political persuasion and erotic seduction and can thus address both public and private motivations on their own terms, is the logical instrument for reconciling these two poles. Unlike other conceivable forms of government, the radical communism instituted by Praxagora is the ideal vehicle for this play because it brings out extremes of both public and private motivations. The structure of the play—which is virtually a series of episodic arguments or *agônes* in which everyday citizens must come to terms with the dilemma of whether to obey the new laws—positively encourages the notion that the play is about *peithô* and the problems of public discourse.

This chapter will focus on the plot, the narrative aspect of the play; in the next chapter I want to concentrate on characterization, which is more static, and pay special attention to the relationship between Praxagora and Greek traditions of rhetoric. In this chapter I proceed scene-by-scene and explore the ways in which persuasion, *erôs*, obedience and self-interest account for the events of the play. A case in point, as we saw in the last chapter, was the success of Athena in the *Oresteia* in using verbal argument to reconcile the Furies to a peaceful life at Athens. The *Philoctetes* showed the importance for a healthy community of sincere persuasion and the failure of deception and force. In the Aristophanic corpus *peithô* was powerful yet morally problematic in the *Knights* and the *Birds*. One could also point to more positive instances of the process of persuasion: Dicaeopolis persuades half the chorus in the *Acharnians* to reject war, in the *Plutus* Wealth is convinced that he should regain his sight and in the *Lysistrata* the women use *dolos* and hold out the promise of *erôs* to achieve peaceful reconciliation.[1] I see *peithô* in the *Ecclesiazusae* as a promising and morally positive force, especially as wielded by Praxagora, who grieves at her country's misfortunes (*Eccl.* 173–5) and whose avowed intention is to do the city some good (108). The first half of her speech (171–209)—which

[1] Long 1972, 286.

she will give at an assembly called to discuss the city's salvation (σωτηρία, 396)—is a deeply felt criticism of the leadership of the city and cannot help but give the impression that she has a serious moral purpose. Her initial success will be limited, of course, by the self-interested attitudes of several members of the *dêmos*. They are not the gullible Demos of the first part of the *Knights*, but more conniving and arrogant. Since some half-dozen of the characters in the play are virtually anonymous, brought on stage primarily as citizens concerned with or affected by the new laws, we are justified in seeing them as representative of the Athenian *dêmos*.

In Chapter One we saw that the play can legitimately be seen as a series of episodes or acts; for my purposes the most sensible approach is to examine the interaction of particular sets of characters and therefore I organize my discussion around six sequences:[2] (A) Praxagora formulates her scheme and organizes the women (1–310); (B) Blepyrus and Chremes react to the news of the assembly (311–477); (C) Praxagora wins the consensus of Blepyrus and Chremes (478–729, including the formal *agôn* 581–709); (D) the two citizens debate whether to obey the new law or not (730–876); (E) the old women claim a young man for their own (877–1111); (F) a short finale and *exodos* in which Blepyrus returns to be fêted (1111–1183). Although (C) is the formal *agôn* ("contest"), (D) and (E), although less formal and lacking set speeches, surely are contests in their own rights as well. The trilogy including the *Trojan Women* may have presented a series of debates, *agônes*, that in failing to achieve justice constitute a critique of sophistic rhetoric and ethics (see above, p. 34); studying the *Ecclesiazusae* as a series of *agônes* may be a fitting approach given the episodic character of the play.[3] (The *Frogs* follows a similar plan: the protagonist sets the intrigue in motion, and then steps aside for others to bring about its realization.) Each scene in the play involves issues related to the means of *peithô* (whether it will rely on words, *erôs* or *dolos*) or its ends (whether it can overcome self-interest and lead to a consensus). Furthermore, much of the action is accompanied by a constant awareness of or allusion to the equation of *erôs* and politics on the level of language, symbolism, and imagery. While it would be impossible to claim to have found one controlling symbol for the play,[4] *erôs* and seduction are

[2] These approximate the act divisions tentatively established by Sommerstein 1984b, 144–45.

[3] Likewise the episodes of the *Knights* have been seen as a series of negative and positive models meant to engage the viewer: Schwinge 1977, 177–99; see above pp. 23–25. Aristotle, it might be noted, evidently thought that fourth-century dramatists made their characters speak like rhetoricians (*Poetics* 1450b7); see Lucas 1968, 107.

[4] Whitman, for example, saw the phallus as the central image in the *Lysistrata* (1964, 209).

metaphorically associated with the world of politics and rhetoric in ways that we traced in Chapter Two. In this play we can discern a consistent if loose network of verbal imagery that works in both directions: (a) objects or vocabulary that are overtly political take on a sexual significance and (b) what is primarily sexual[5] takes on a political significance.

Persuasion (and seduction) are ubiquitous in literature, but what determines the action in the *Ecclesiazusae* is more specific. *Erôs*, rhetoric, and politics are linked in especially interesting ways. Even the *Lysistrata*, which also exploits the relationship between *erôs*, politics and *peithô*, differs from the *Ecclesiazusae* in several important respects—a matter I will return to in the next chapter.

A) *Praxagora and the women (1–310)*

Although the *Ecclesiazusae* will become a battleground of competing sexual and political interests, it begins on a note of relative consensus. A speaker is most persuasive when she can convince the audience that what she proposes is in their self-interest; Praxagora shares common interests with the women and they offer no real opposition. Nevertheless her speech and her leadership have a galvanizing effect on the women. Thanks to the rhetorical abilities of Praxagora, in the opening scenes deliberation and initial uncertainty give way to a spirit of consensus and unanimity. Surely this represents an ideal of democratic participation that the men of Athens respect yet risk losing; she even teaches the women to vote (266–68)! The good old days of Myronides, when citizens selflessly attended the assembly without expecting payment and even brought their own lunch, are singled out for praise by the chorus when it leaves (304–8). The entries and exits of the opening act (1–310) reinforce the impression that the women are indeed brought into order by Praxagora; in formal terms there is a prologue (1–284) followed by an *exodos* of the chorus (285–310) but no *parodos* to speak of inasmuch as the chorus members enter individually, one at a time. This manner of bringing them on stage, used also in the *Lysistrata*, highlights the lack of coordination of the women in their first fumbling attempts to prepare for the assembly. Yet after the speech they leave as one chorus, singing and dancing, sure of their purpose.[6] The women do not need to be persuaded that the new

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[5] Admittedly the question of what is sexual language and what is not can be a thorny one. What is "erotic" vocabulary in one context may be innocent in another. Or it may operate on two levels, with an innocent face-value but seen as bawdy by the spectators; see McLeish 1980, 100; Henderson 1975, 30–55.

[6] Hulley 1953, 131.

form of government is in their interest—they had already reached a consensus about this and made preliminary plans at the Skira—but they do need to be convinced that they have the ability to complete the *coup d'État.*

Praxagora's rhetorical strategies to build their confidence include vigorous exhortations (93–109, 111–114, 116–119) and her speech. The first half of the speech is a point-by-point attack on the policies perpetuated by the men (171–209): they have bad leaders; they have only attended the *ekklêsia* when monetary incentives are offered; one *rhêtôr* who evidently persuaded (ἀναπείσας, 196) them to form the alliance with the Corinthians was disregarded by the inconstant Athenians and he left the city. Significantly Praxagora appeals to the women's interest in *erôs*: she extols the traditional virtues of women—in effect sanctioning them—which include adultery (225) and the enjoyment of sex (228). She concludes by promising them that if they trust her (πείθησθε, 239; cf. 209) they will be happy (εὐδαιμονοῦντες, 240).

Such incentives have their appeal, and we can trace the effect they have on the women. Their initial worries centered on behavior in the *ekklêsia*: "How will a female-minded gathering (συνουσία)[7] of women address the *dêmos*?" (114), asks one, who is afraid that their inexperience will be disastrous. She even finds wearing a wreath (*stephanos*) laughable and, since wreaths were conventionally worn at a symposium, thinks that they will be drinking (136). Their initial attempts to speak are not promising: they give themselves away by mistakenly swearing by Demeter and Kore (155) and addressing the audience as women (165). Praxagora gives her own speech, as a demonstration, and it is during this that they finally remember to address her as a man (ξυνετὸς ἀνήρ, 204; ὦγαθέ, 213). Thus the women are convinced of the feasibility of the plan, and are both able and willing to pretend that they are men and to participate in the assembly.

True to the traditions that link women with deception and *peithô* (outlined in Chapter Two, p. 35), the women succeed in disguising themselves and usurping the assembly. Women are "accustomed to deceive" (ἐξαπατᾶν εἰθισμέναι, 238), says Praxagora.[8] In fact, deception is a recurrent concern in the prologue: the very opening had been an address to a lamp that was treasured because, though it knows the plans

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[7] Usually συνουσία means "assembly" or "gathering," though in other contexts it means "sexual intercourse" (cf. συνουσία τῶν ἀφροδισίων, *Symp.* 192c); Ussher 1973, 90, sees a possible *double-entendre* here: sexual intercourse/political gathering.

[8] Though men, too, were known to stack meetings of the assembly with their supporters; see the discussion of Sinclair 1988, 206–7.

the women have, it does not tell secrets (17). In sitting in the assembly seats they must be furtive (λαθεῖν, 23), in stealing clothes they must not be noticed (λαθεῖν, 27), and when they sneak out of home their husbands should not notice (λαθεῖν, 35). They have fashioned disguises and false beards—one woman even stole Lamius' stick secretly (λάθρᾳ, 77). The women will hitch up their cloaks without drawing attention (λήσομεν, 98). When we learn that Agyrrhius secretly wore someone else's beard (λέληθε, 103), it only confirms what is suspected about him anyway—that he uses female tricks. Even Blepyrus eventually realizes that his wife has gotten away from him secretly (λαθοῦσα, 337). S.F. MacMathuna's study of imagery in the play confirms this pattern: the darkness of the pre-dawn meeting, he suggests, is to be associated with the women and their deceptions.[9] These have been recently related to the feminine quality of *mêtis*, "cunning intelligence," which allows the women in the *Ecclesiazusae* to outwit the men.[10] Their ability to disguise themselves and imitate the men accurately (accuracy is stressed twice: 162, 274) contributes to the effectiveness of the deception. When they are about to depart for the assembly, all dressed up as men, they claim that they are "imitating the manner of country men" (τὸν τρόπον μιμούμεναι τὸν τῶν ἀγροίκων, 278). After she returns and is confronted by Blepyrus, Praxagora immediately concedes that she was purposely imitating him (μιμουμένη, 545) and claims she took his clothing so she would be taken for a man and would not be assaulted. Their disguise and deception is, in any event, consistent with *peithô*.[11]

Even apart from the events in the first part of the play that suggest the role of persuasion and deception, imagery repeatedly supports the association between the erotic and political sphere, the two aspects of *peithô*. We will examine in detail the "ship of state" imagery, and vocabulary of debating and voting.

When Praxagora declares that the status quo is inadequate she invokes the metaphor (innocent, on the face of it) of the ship of state (106–9, 208). This metaphor has a long tradition in Greek poetry,[12] and it is to be expected that this persisted at Athens, especially since, after Salamis, the navy was one of the major instruments of power for the Athenian *dêmos*. Athens was represented abroad by the state ships "Salaminia" and "Paralos." Moreover, Conon's naval victory at Cnidus and the rebuilding of the Long Walls to Piraeus were both recent events when the

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[9] MacMathuna 1971, 159–181.

[10] Byl 1982, 33–40.

[11] For an analysis of the metatheatrical implications of the deception and disguise see Taaffe 1987, 64–175.

[12] Gerlach 1937, 127–39; see now Edmunds 1987, 8–15.

Ecclesiazusae was written. The use of the navy is clearly a topical political issue: Praxagora mentions the launching of ships (ναῦς καθέλκειν, 197) as one of the questions of the day and she resorts to the ship of state metaphor a few lines later when she warns that "the state tosses to and fro" (τὸ κοινὸν κυλίνδεται, 208).[13] An earlier use of the metaphor may be more telling. Describing the state of the city, Praxagora had said to the women, "Let us take a dare so great . . . so as for the city to fare well. For now we neither sail (θέομεν) nor row" (ἐλαύνομεν, 106–109).[14] Since she immediately goes on (112–13) to describe how women, by virtue of their love-making, will become political orators capable of dealing with this (just like youths, a similarity discussed below, pp. 77–81), it is not too much to see a *double-entendre* in this context. 'Ελαύνειν, used above in the sense of "row," also has a clear sexual connotation. This meaning is well attested, even in the *Ecclesiazusae* itself: when the women first assembled, one woman excused her tardiness by explaining that her husband, a "Salaminian," was "driving" her (ἤλαυνε, 39) all night long on the mattress.[15] The action of rowing was thought to resemble intercourse. Plato *comicus* too described sexual activity in these terms: the male is ἐλαυνῶν ("driving" or "rowing") and the female is the ἐλαυνομένη ("rowed," fr. 3K).[16] Huber suggests that the husband is actually a crewman on the state ship "Salaminia" and he is here "rowing his boat," the boat being his wife.[17] What is ostensibly political behavior has an unexpected erotic side to it.

This unexpected erotic side recurs in the description of debate in the assembly. One woman is afraid that Praxagora will not be able to deliver her speech. The language is revealing:

Γυ. τί δ' ἢν ὑποκρούωσίν σε; Πρ. προσκινήσομαι
ἅτ' οὐκ ἄπειρος οὖσα πολλῶν κρουμάτων.

[13] Already in Herodotus τὸ κοινόν was a synonym for the state (1.67) and κυλίνδειν had been used since Homer to describe the effects of the sea; Aristophanes used μετακυλίνδειν of a ship's tossing at *Frogs* 536.

[14] For the nautical metaphor see Huber 1974, 55.

[15] Henderson 1975, 162; Taillardat 1965, 101; Komornicka 1981, 76. The scholion on this line explains that Salaminian sailors were κατωφεραί, "prone to vice, lewd": Dübner 1843, 315; Rutherford 1896, 514. On nautical imagery in general see also Gannon 1982, 254–261.

[16] By extension, the oar used in rowing becomes the male sexual organ. This language is used in its sexual sense elsewhere in the *Ecclesiazusae*: we find that the young man subdued by the old women asks, "How will I be able to row (δικωπεῖν) both women at once?" (1086–91). Moreover the word τρύπημα (the "oar-hole") could be slang for female genitalia (see *Eccl.* 624, 906; Henderson 1975, 142 and Taillardat 1965, 76). Praxagora outwitted Blepyrus by slipping out of the house, "through the hole" ἐκτετρύπηκεν, 337), leaving him with his oar dangling, no doubt.

[17] Huber 1974, 48.

Woman 1: What if they interrupt you?
Praxagora: I'll move against them, not being inexperienced myself in many strokes.

Eccl. 256–7

The verb ὑποκρούειν was virtually a technical term that meant "to interrupt" a speaker.[18] Praxagora uses it this way in a passage later in the *Ecclesiazusae* when, explaining the new social program to Blepyrus, she tells him, "Don't any of you contradict and don't interrupt (ὑποκρούειν) until you know the scheme" (588–9). No sooner has she said this than he does interrupt, and she scolds him, "You interrupted me too soon!" (ἔφθης μ' ὑποκρούσας, 596). On the surface, then, the woman and Praxagora are discussing strategies in debate (256–57), but the words, beyond any doubt, have erotic connotations: ὑποκρούειν and κροῦμα refer to the thrusting of sex.[19] In fact ὑποκρούειν is used in exactly this sense later in the play, when Praxagora tells Blepyrus that she has arranged the community of women so that a man must first ὑποκρούειν (= "bang below," 618)[20] an ugly woman before he can go to a pretty one. Here, obviously, ὑποκρούειν is used in its sexual sense. Moreover, προσκινεῖν is a compound of κινεῖν, which is in turn a virtual synonym of the common word for intercourse, βινεῖν.[21] She will "move against" or "move toward" in sexual congress; thus the parliamentary procedure that these *rhêtores* follow has come to suggest something that belongs even more to the realm of *erôs*.[22] The double meaning of the language perfectly illustrates the

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[18] Dicaeopolis says he is prepared to "shout down, interrupt (ὑποκρούειν), and abuse the *rhêtores* at the assembly" (*Ach.* 38). In the pseudo-Platonic *Eryxias*, one speaker interrupts another in the same way: ὑποκρούσας (395e).

[19] Taillardat 1965, 103; Henderson 1975, 171; Komornicka 1981, 78; Buttrey 1977, 5–23.

[20] Henderson 1975, 171.

[21] Taillardat 1965, 103; Henderson 1975, 151. προσκινεῖν is used in an explicitly sexual sense at *Lys.* 227.

[22] No less obscene is Praxagora's use of κρούειν here and its compounds that appear later in the play. They form a minor motif of their own. Blepyrus, by personifying his constipated feces as the *Kopreaios* who "bangs at my door" (τὴν θύραν κρούων, 316–7), turns his remark into a pederastic joke: here the θύρα is his πρωκτός (see Taillardat 1965, 70; Henderson 1975, 102). Later in the play we see the heterosexual equivalent: when the young man is trying to get the young girl, but encounters the old lady instead, he explains that he needs to break into (κρουστέον) this door (τηνδεδί, 989). She tells him he can do it only when he enters *her* door (ὅταν γε κρούσεις τὴν ἐμὴν θύραν, 990). Even if κρούειν is literal at 989, the *double-entendre* would at least be obvious at 990 (Dover 1966b, 15; Ussher 1969, 35), where θύρα must mean κύσθος (Taillardat 1965, 77; Henderson 1975, 137). The old lady later repeats her instructions to the youth when she recites the *psêphisma* (1013) that if a man desires a young girl he must προκρούειν (1017, 1018) an old woman first or they grab him by the πάτταλος (1020), here a synonym for his penis (Taillardat 1965, 73;

interchangeability of the two realms (*erôs* and politics) and their equivalence in action. Praxagora knows that she will have to be prepared on both fronts—as if the one automatically included the other.

The danger of interruption in debate is followed by another problem: when called on to vote, the women will have to remember to raise their hands. That the Athenian vote was taken by a show of hands (the *cheirotonia*) is clear from Xenophon's description of an adjournment of the assembly on the grounds that it was too dark to see the hands.[23] The women must therefore remember to raise their hands, but this will not be easy for they are "accustomed to raising their legs" (αἴρειν τὼ σκέλει, 265), an expression which, as the scholiast explains (if it needed explanation), describes intercourse.[24] What initially should have been a purely political act takes on sexual innuendo here: women were accustomed to demonstrate their preferences by raising their legs; calling attention to the similarity between this and voting confirms the affinity between *erôs* and politics.

These superficially political matters—the ship-of-state metaphor, behavior in the assembly, voting—are all presented in such a way that the business of politics naturally entails sexual activity; they are a comic *reductio ad absurdum* of the categories of *peithô*.

Before leaving this section a remark about the title is in order. *Ecclesiazusae*, translated as "Assemblywomen" (Sommerstein), "Congresswomen" (Parker; a droll *double-entendre*?), "Women in Power" (McLeish), is of course the feminine participial form, referring to the chorus, of ἐκκλησιάζειν, which often means simply "to attend the *ekklêsia*." But the word may mean more. In his recent commentary on the *Athenaion Politeia*, P.J. Rhodes has noticed that the word was used in an early chapter (15.4) to describe how Hippias disarmed the Athenian *dêmos* and began to "ἐκκλησιάζειν." Rhodes says, "Here it must mean 'to

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Henderson 1975, 123). Although these few lines serve to introduce the pun on the name Prokrustes, the word προκρούειν also has a pseudo-technical ring to it designed to fit the peculiar sexual regulations of the women (Henderson 1975, 171). Certainly the old women's language is legalistic (see van Leeuwen 1905, *ad loc.*).

[23] *Hellenica* 1.7.1; see Hansen 1977, 124. Other evidence for the show of hands is the fragment of Plato *comicus* (185K) in which a character named Demos says, "Hold my hand, I'm about to vote for Agyrrhius as *stratêgos*"; it has been suggested that the vote in question is for Agyrrhius' command on Lesbos in spring 388—thus some four years after the *Ecclesiazusae*. Evidently Demos in this fragment is pretending to be in childbirth and may thus be dressed as a woman (Edmonds 1957, 549). The fragment thus parallels this incident in the *Ecclesiazusae* in that it satirizes Agyrrhius, concerns the *cheirotonia*, and apparently uses transvestism to raise the issue of women in politics.

[24] For this scholion see Dübner 1843, 317; Rutherford 1896, 527; parallels of the raised legs are *Lys.* 229 and *Pax* 889; see Henderson 1975, 173.

hold an assembly as chairman' or 'address the assembly,' a usage not noticed in LSJ or the 1968 Supplement."[25] To be sure many occurrences of ἐκκλησιάζειν in Greek need mean no more than "attend the assembly", where participation is passive only and it is clear that speaking is a separate activity.[26] Yet occasionally the verb must refer to active deliberation, not simple listening.[27] Since the first part of the *Athenaion Politeia* may have been written early in the fourth century, it need not be wildly anachronistic to suggest that ἐκκλησιάζειν meant this in the 390's, when the *Ecclesiazusae* was written. A look at the text of the *Ecclesiazusae* itself finds the word used only once: when Praxagora, coaching a woman who has difficulty speaking correctly, says:

παῦε τοίνυν, ὡς ἐγὼ
ἐκκλησιάσουσ' οὐκ ἂν προβαίην τὸν πόδα
τὸν ἕτερον, εἰ μὴ ταῦτ' ἀκριβωθήσεται.

No more, then, since, unless these things are absolutely right, I wouldn't take one more step when I intend to ἐκκλησιάζειν.

Eccl. 160–62

The woman then tries again, and fails, to get her opening line straight; six lines later Praxagora herself begins to speak. Surely she uses ἐκκλησιάζειν to mean "to address the assembly." To translate ἐκκλησιάζειν as merely "attend the assembly" seems curiously bland; the women are clearly talking about speaking, active participation in the assembly, not passive attendance. Although we never *see* the chorus of the play attend the assembly, we do see preparations for speeches—though only Praxagora is articulate enough for public performance. Thus the possibility should be considered that that we have misunderstood the connotation of the title; it may have been meant to stress the importance of the *rhêtôr*, the political speaker who can exploit the possibilities of *peithô*.

B) *Blepyrus and Chremes (311–477)*

This scene serves two important purposes: it introduces Blepyrus, who is paradigmatic of the selfishness of the *dêmos*, and Chremes, who will give an account of the speeches and events at the assembly meeting, where

[25] Rhodes 1981, 39.
[26] *Wasps* 32; pseudo-Xenophon *Ath.Pol.* 1,9; Demosthenes 19.193.
[27] Isocrates 8.2, 8.13; Demosthenes 18.265; Thucydides 8.77.

Praxagora has spoken, which allows us to assess the efficacy of her rhetoric.

Blepyrus emerges as soon as the chorus has praised the good old days of Myronides, when citizens attended the assembly without payment (305ff.). Although the allusion to Myronides may have been in part prompted by the "Golden Age" motif, nostalgically recalling a generation of morally superior men,[28] the passage at hand probably has a more specific point: the danger that men will be more selfish and less inclined to participate in political decision-making. Blepyrus' only concern is to get the payment for assembly attendance; his all-too-visible constipation not only illustrates his complete self-absorption but also is the perfect symbol for his individualistic hoarding of material possessions.[29] When he finds out from Chremes that he is too late to get the *triôbolon* (380) he cries out in inconsolable tragic lament (391)—one of the very few instances of paratragedy in the play.[30]

It is from Chremes that Blepyrus learns that the actual meeting of the *ekklêsia* has already taken place; Chremes reports its main events. Of course the practice of describing important off-stage events may derive from Euripides, whose messengers recounted murders and the like,[31] and Aristophanes had used messengers before (*Acharnians* 1174–89 and especially *Knights* 624–82 on an assembly), but putting an assembly on stage was feasible and done in *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*. The advantage Aristophanes gains by using the "messenger" speech is that it allows us to see Blepyrus' reaction while at the same time keeping him at home, paralyzed by his inability to act.

Chremes' account reveals that the men at the assembly were as inept at oratory as Praxagora's cohorts had been. Neocleides, half blind, crept on stage only to be greeted with derision from the audience (largely women, of course): "How dare he attempt to speak in public (δημηγορεῖν), about the safety of the city at that, when he can't even save his own eyesight!" (400–2). Euaion, the next speaker, wins more pity since he is poor and ill-clothed—a condition that must reflect the poverty that some Athenians experienced in the 390's. His solution, a kind of redistribution of wealth in which the rich give to the poor, anticipates Praxagora's even more radical proposal and Chremes says Euaion's words were "most popular" (δημοτικωτάτους λόγους, 411). Yet we are left with the sense that he, too,

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[28] See above, p. 9: Carrière 1979, 101; Auger 1979, 73–77.

[29] Foley 1982, 14.

[30] Barry 1942, 53–4; Rau 1967, 185.

[31] Fraenkel 1936, 473. Harriott points out that the messenger speech would be immediately recognized as an intruder from tragedy (1986, 4).

sees the interest of the state in terms of his own well-being.[32] Moreover one must be suspicious when Euaion's proposals win immediate approval from Blepyrus, who is hardly a selfless supporter of the common good.

Chremes' account of the speech he heard from the handsome youth (εὐπρεπὴς νεανίας, 427) echoes, not surprisingly, the speech Praxagora gave (171–240). Nevertheless we have in the play two "speeches"—the one Praxagora gave in rehearsal and Chremes' second-hand account—and they invite comparison. Chremes does not repeat Praxagora's litany of complaints about foreign policy, but he does spell out the new laws of the women's regime. Both speeches share some specific points (entrusting the city to women, παραδοῦναι ταῖς γυναιξὶ τὴν πόλιν, 430, cf. 211; finding them best suited to dispose of financial affairs, χρήματα πορίζειν εὐπορώτατον, 236, cf. χρηματοποιόν, 442). Otherwise, however, the two speeches use rather different arguments; we might think of each as having its own rhetorical strategy.

The first speech, Praxagora's rehearsal, by spending more time on the domestic virtues of women and by stressing their traditionalism (221–228 in particular), concentrates on the abstract basis for the decision to have women rule. Chremes' report of the speech at the assembly, however, deals with issues more concretely, and focusses on the results of the decision and the political usefulness of these changes (cf. 446–450); the consequences for the men are much clearer after this speech (460ff.). Thus where the first speech emphasizes women's traditionalism, the second stresses their innovation, or explains how the traditional virtues will be used in new ways.[33] The first speech is meant to be more reassuring to the women and to give them the confidence to complete their plot. The second speech does nothing to flatter the men in the audience; in fact, it is a sobering challenge to them, particularly since it contains specific, derogatory charges about the men's inability to rule and details their lack of civic virtue (calling them rogues, πανοῦργοι, 437; and thieves, κλέπται, 438).

We expect the men to react defensively. After all, Praxagora had worried about what would happen if men tried to ὑποκρούειν (256) or λοιδορεῖν (248) her and, indeed, when she does speak, we hear that there was some grumbling from the countrymen (ἀνεβορβόρυξαν, 433) with whom Blepyrus is sympathetic. Yet opposition beyond this is not reported, and none was described at the time of the resolution (ἔδοξεν, 445). Praxagora was apparently able to shout them down (βοῇ, 434).

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[32] Foley 1982, 14.

[33] Strauss 1966, 167, also calls attention to this difference in emphasis between the speeches.

One argument that would appeal to the men is the statement that Chremes repeats: women will not inform, prosecute, or dissolve the democracy (καταλύειν τὸν δῆμον, 453); this casts them in a traditional, law-abiding light. The enthusiasm of the disguised women must have had its effect on at least some of the men there: Chremes certainly appears to have been won over; he scarcely objects to the new plan, becoming a virtual spokesman for the women. He seems so willing to cast his lot with the new government that he explains its logic to Blepyrus (cf. 471–2), and even Blepyrus concedes that the women are right to say that men can't keep secrets (445). To this extent, then, we can say that Praxagora's performance in the assembly has out-done the men's; with the *dolos* of disguise and Praxagora's rhetoric the women have been highly effective.

C) *The* agôn: *Praxagora defends her plan (478–729)*

Praxagora's persuasiveness in the *ekklêsia* is matched by her persuasiveness with her husband. In the following scenes, including the *agôn* proper (571–709), Praxagora forces him, by various means (*dolos*, *erôs*, verbal argument), to rethink his self-interest and wins his full approval for the new political program.

The initial encounter between Blepyrus and Praxagora is one of the most effective scenes in the play, with the built-in tension and excitement of watching Praxagora, who summons up her verbal wit and talent for deception, feign ignorance and evade discovery as a conspirator in the plot. Blepyrus seems dull next to her, unable to match his wife in the verbal repartee that follows. She counters and anticipates every accusation, even going so far as to dare him to interrogate her about adultery (522); it is thus Praxagora, not Blepyrus, who takes the initiative even on a subject as sensitive as marital fidelity. Praxagora ably manipulates and exploits *dolos*; she has completely distracted Blepyrus from his chief concern (Where was she?) by introducing red herrings along the way (A lover? A childbirth?) and then by enthusiastically extolling the new system. In her own way she effectively frustrates and distracts Blepyrus (much as Myrrhine had frustrated Kinesias' aspirations in the *Lysistrata*) by not quite letting him get what he wants. Yet Blepyrus is easily distracted; he is not a man of steadfast concentration and determination, and is scarcely Praxagora's equal. In fact one might suppose that Aristophanes, having created such an able character as Praxagora, has squandered her on Blepyrus—but we will compare them at greater length in the next chapter (pp. 95–101).

In the *agôn* (571–727) Praxagora puts *dolos* behind and uses *peithô*, which results in a measurable change in Blepyrus' attitude. (This stands

in contrast to the *agôn* of the *Lysistrata*, where a *fait accompli* is explained to a sceptical male, who is not as receptive.)[34] Blepyrus' initial resistance to Praxagora and the new regime is overcome by her careful explanation of the new laws—we might speak of her rhetorical strategy in this exposition—and by the increasingly attractive availability of sex; that Praxagora is able to win his approval of the new political order must be in large measure due to the erotic favors that would come his way.

Praxagora and Blepyrus are not Myrrhine and Kinesias of the *Lysistrata*, but sexual enticement does play a role in Praxagora's success in winning Blepyrus' acceptance. When he first heard about the new government from Chremes, Blepyrus had initial reservations about the prospect of being forced to perform sex:

> Βλ. ἐκεῖνο δεινὸν τοῖσιν ἡλίκοισι νῷν,
> μὴ παραλαβοῦσαι τῆς πόλεως τὰς ἡνίας
> ἔπειτ' ἀναγκάζωσι πρὸς βίαν— Χρ. τί δρᾶν;
> Βλ. κινεῖν ἑαυτάς. Χρ. ἢν δὲ μὴ δυνώμεθα;
> Βλ. ἄριστον οὐ δώσουσι. Χρ. σὺ δέ γε νὴ Δία
> δρᾶ ταῦθ', ἵν' ἀριστᾷς τε καὶ κινῇς ἅμα.
>
> Blepyrus: That's the danger for men of our age:
> after the women take the reins of the city,
> they will then compel us, by force...
> Chremes: To do what?
> Blepyrus: To screw them.
> Chremes: And if we are not able?
> Blepyrus: They won't feed us breakfast.
> Chremes: So, by Zeus, just do it, so you can
> screw and eat breakfast simultaneously.
>
> *Eccl.* 465–70

Blepyrus has told us that he is an old man (γέρων, 323) and is evidently concerned about impotence. In spite of the prominence that the *oikos* is accorded in this play, Blepyrus and Praxagora have no children; could he be sterile? His initial reaction to the new sexual arrangements is understandably one of uncertainty and apprehension. But this does not last long; when this scene ends he leaves the stage with the optimistic notion that things will work out for the best (474–5).

His impotence is intimated in a less direct way after he confronts

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[34] The *agôn*, although in form ideally suited for persuasion, is actually used in most plays for insult and exacerbation. In general the two contestants do not convince one another (though they may convince a third party); see Long 1972, 285–99.

Praxagora on her return home; she had taken the cloak he was using as a blanket and he complains, "You went off, abandoning me like a corpse laid out for burial, neither having garlanded me nor having placed the funeral urn (λήκυθος) beside me" (537–38). It seems natural, in light of his anxieties, that his abandonment in bed, like a corpse, must have some sexual connotation. It is tempting to see such a significance here since it is repeated in one of the last scenes of the play: the young man, captured by old women and being dragged off to bed, is so far from being aroused that he claims he too is like a corpse, and asks for funeral rites. With the appropriate ribbons and funeral λήκυθοι set out (1032) in his last words he requests: "Bury me. . ." (1107). In context this should have a sexual connotation as well.

The rejuvenation of an old man is a frequent and natural event in comedy, as students of the genre have duly observed,[35] and I propose that in this play Blepyrus undergoes just such a change. The instrument of this is, moreover, Praxagora's seductive *peithô*. Although Blepyrus was initially hesitant about the prospect of sex (465–70) and was a "corpse" in bed (537–8),[36] he is gradually cured of his doubts during the *agôn* when Praxagora explains the new system in more detail. The spectre of communism of sex is not initially raised because it poses a threatening imposition on the men, but because Blepyrus begins to see the advantages:

Βλ. ἢν μεἰρακ' ἰδὼν ἐπιθυμήσῃ καὶ βούληται σκαλαθῦραι...

Blepyrus: What if [someone of us men], having seen a girl, desires her and wants to poke her?

Eccl. 611

Putting the question in the third person (an unspecified "someone" is evidently the subject of the sentence) surely is a disingenuous way of asking for himself. His hesitations begin to evaporate, though Praxagora needs to reassure him:

Βλ. καὶ πῶς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πρεσβύτας, ἢν ταῖς αἰσχραῖσι συνῶμεν,
οὐκ ἐπιλείψει τὸ πέος πρότερον πρὶν ἐκεῖσ' οἷ φῂς ἀφικέσθαι;
Πρ. οὐχὶ μαχοῦνται περὶ σοῦ· θάρρει, μὴ δείσῃς· οὐχὶ μαχοῦνται.

[35] Schmid 1946, 195; Frye 1965, 121; Bakhtin 1968, 196–277; MacCary 1985, 28, calls the rejuvenation of old men in Aristophanes the "Dionysus pattern"; Blepyrus, notes Strauss, is the only one to swear by Dionysus: Strauss 1966, 266.

[36] His impotence in the beginning of the play is also underscored when, trying to defecate, he invokes Eileithuia, goddess of childbirth (369). Foley sees this as (among other things) a metaphor for the barrenness of the men's political leadership (1982, 14).

Βλ. περὶ τοῦ; Πρ. τοῦ μὴ ξυγκαταδαρθεῖν. καὶ σοὶ τοιοῦτον ὑπάρχει.

Bleyprus: And, as for us old men, if we sleep with ugly women first, won't our pricks let us down before we get to [the handsome girls]?
Praxagora: They won't fight about you. Take courage, don't fear; they won't fight.
Blepyrus: About what?
Praxagora: About [your] not sleeping with them; and such is your natural state [i.e. impotence].

Eccl. 619–622

She, his wife, should know about that. Yet he persistently asks about sexual relations for several more lines; do we detect a spark of interest? He begins to see that it makes some sense (γνώμη, 623), and finally realizes, of course, that being an old man he is precisely one of those who qualify to have his choice of girls.

At the end of the *agôn* Praxagora describes the state of affairs as she envisions it: food for everyone, and after the meal a drunken man, taking his torch (δᾷδα, 692) will be beckoned by offers of a young girl (μεῖραξ, 696), though the young must wait for the uglier men (φαυλότεροι, 702) to go first. Praxagora asks Blepyrus whether these things are satisfactory to him and he replies, "Very much so" (πάνυ, 710). This does not prove renewed sexual potency, but is a far cry from the first reaction to the prospect of having to engage in sex ("terrible," δεινόν, 465). He cheerfully sets off for the banquet with Praxagora.

Indications not only of renewed erotic interest but also of ability appear in the last scene. Blepyrus arrives in time for the banquet; the hostess gushes about the wine that is to be had, and wants to lead him "and these girls (μείρακες, 1138) with you."[37] These are evidently dancing girls;[38] Wilamowitz suggested that they were actually naked.[39] Whether or not this was so, we may suppose that the attraction between Blepyrus and the girls is fundamentally erotic. Fittingly it is only here, at the end of the play (if anywhere), that we may assume that he has put his own clothes back on.[40] Casting off the clothes of a woman and putting on those of a man

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[37] A theme that I have not developed is the affinity between sex and food. For the Greeks, an immoderate man was one who could not control his indulgent appetite for either sex or food (or drink!). Accordingly all of these can be included in the "affective" aspects of *peithô*, e.g. "tempting" with food. Of course Plato compared rhetoric to cookery in the *Gorgias* 463b. On the similarity of such desires see Dover 1974, 208; Foucault 1985, 69–72, and see North 1966, 123–32, for its importance in Xenophon's portrait of Socrates.

[38] Ussher 1973, 230.

[39] Wilamowitz 1927, 57.

[40] Ussher 1973, 147, assumes he put on a tunic when he returns at 520—but even here there is no decisive evidence; see Stone 1981, 412–413.

may reflect renewed male potency and a more secure male identity.

He continues toward the feast saying, "I have, you know, also this torch (δᾷδα), fortunately" (1150). It may not be too much to invest this with some sexual significance. Ussher points out that *Dais* could be the nickname of a courtesan.[41] The young men being preyed on as they left the banquet (690–710) had torches; so too the young man in the final episode had one when trying to get into the girl's house (δᾷδα, 1078). Blepyrus' rejuvenation is not as pronounced as those of Dicaeopolis, Demos or Trygaeus,[42] yet Blepyrus had farther to go: the sterility of his defecation scene and his fears of impotence have been reinforced by the death imagery that we find preceding the *agôn*. *Any* revival of interest on his part can constitute a figurative rebirth.

Perhaps it is no coincidence then that precisely at the time he announced his death (535–38)—and immediately before the *agôn* when he will be persuaded—we should find Praxagora characterize herself as a midwife. She was gone, she says, because she had to help a friend in labor, giving birth to a boy (528–29, 549). This is the turning point in the play: hereafter Blepyrus will be won over and emerge a supporter of the new order—and eventually an enthusiastic participant in the festivities at the end, where he reappears with a girl young enough to be his daughter. That Praxagora attended a birth may be an idle excuse, typical of adulterers, but it is a natural event in comedy and confirms Northrop Frye's prescription: "The mythical or primitive basis of comedy is a movement toward the rebirth and renewal of the powers of nature . . . The movement from sterility to renewed life is a natural one."[43] The birth that she aids is, I suggest, the figurative rebirth of Blepyrus who, at the end of the *agôn*, may be said to have found his social function and identity: when they march off he announces that he "is seen" (ἀποβλέπομαι, 726)—giving us the etymology of his name.[44]

The transformation is less pronounced in Chremes because he has already become an "enthusiastic convert"[45] to Praxagora's cause. He seems won over by the speech she gave at the very outset, and even comes to Praxagora's defense when Blepyrus will not be quiet ("Let her speak!"

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[41] Ussher 1973, 232. Yet it could equally well have phallic significance. We saw in the very beginning of the play that Praxagora feared that an approaching lamp (λύχνος, 27) was a man. Compare the torch associated with the flute girl at *Wasps* 1363; see MacDowell 1971, 310.

[42] Henderson 1975, 61, 65, 67.

[43] Frye 1965, 119, 122. For the "regenerative" powers of Aristophanic comedy see McLeish 1980, 55, 69. Actual childbirth is more common in New Comedy (Terence, *Adelphoe* 487; Plautus, *Aulularia* 692).

[44] Paganelli 1978/79, 231–235, and see below, p. 96.

[45] Seager 1981, 251.

564). It is he who will eventually set a good example in the episode following the *agôn* by taking his own property to be deposited in the public square. The importance of Chremes' role during the *agôn* depends on how many lines a modern editor will assign him, but in Ussher's text—which gives him a relatively sizeable part—Chremes shows increasing enthusiasm, finally exclaiming: "By Demeter you teach well!" (εὖ γε διδάσκεις, 662). What is more, his enthusiasm may be a factor in Blepyrus' acceptance of Praxagora's plan.

We noted above that the *agôn* was not always in practice the ideal vehicle for persuasive argumentation in Aristophanes: its function could be described as merely epideictic.[46] Certainly the *agôn* in the *Ecclesiazusae* is no *elenchos* either: there is no serious opposing point of view presented for examination.[47] Nevertheless, Praxagora's exposition of the new plan for Athens does have a discernible effect on Blepyrus and Chremes. Blepyrus, who had been uneasy about the regulations when he first heard about them from Chremes, is, at the end of the *agôn*, cheerfully setting off for a banquet.

Praxagora has been an articulate defender of her new government, and has used virtually the full range of *peithô*: initial *dolos*, verbal argument, and the enticement of *erôs*. She succeeds in showing Blepyrus that cooperation with her new laws will work to his advantage. By emphasizing his self-interest she has rechanneled his energies and the end has been achieved: whether persuaded or seduced, he becomes a willing convert and follower, fully integrated into the community, a participant in public life, and sexually reconciled to the new arrangements.

D) *The argument about property (730–876)*

Praxagora and Blepyrus exit, new characters are introduced, and the formal *agôn* (anapests 581–709) is over. Yet we can look at the remaining two long episodes of the play as a series of informal *agônes* in their own right, disputes and heated arguments that have more punch than the formal *agôn* itself. In these episodes the excesses of Praxagora's communism become apparent; what unfolds is a *reductio ad absurdum* of communism: even personal, household belongings are put into public ownership. Yet, as I suggested in Chapter One (pp. 10–11), the best approach to these scenes is to regard them not as an attack on communism *per se* but as a means of exposing the realities of human nature: greed and lust. The

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[46] Long 1972, 285–99.

[47] For such an *elenchos* in the *Clouds* see Nussbaum 1980, 43–97.

new policies are utopian and unrealistic, but in the *Ecclesiazusae* they are effective devices for bringing out all-too-realistic attitudes in the citizens of Athens. Just as, in Conrad, the real truth about a man's character emerges only in the jungle, similarly it is in Praxagora's unorthodox counter-Athens that the underlying nature of various individual members of the *dêmos*, otherwise hidden beneath the conventions of daily life, emerges. The reversal of social hierarchy may be in part festive, but also serves the deeper purpose of thrusting hypocrisy and selfishness into the open, for public inspection. It is important to note, moreover, that many sober citizens in the play *do* see fit to comply with the laws; the laws may seem utopian to us but in the fictional world of the *Ecclesiazusae* they remain laws to the characters. Even if the laws are not, in our eyes, especially worth obeying, they do a good job of provoking selfish conduct in certain citizens.

Since Praxagora herself is no longer on stage we are less inclined to associate these flaws with her.[48] She does not have to confront her antagonists; our memory of her persuasive efficacy remains intact. The fact that there is no central figure dominating the latter half of the play means that we can focus entirely on the newer characters: the contrasting sets of individual citizens hold our attention here.[49] With Praxagora gone, it is left to a loyal follower to argue the case for the new legislation, and, although not named in the manuscripts, this seems to be Chremes. He dutifully takes his belongings to the agora and thus reminds us of the personified Laws in Plato's *Crito* (50a–54d); his antagonist, the "Dissident," is either a new character altogether or the neighbor who happened across Blepyrus earlier (326ff.).[50] Accordingly, since they are either minor characters or completely anonymous, the two men in this episode and the four women and young man in the next episode seem all the more like typical, generic Athenian citizens.[51] Because no particular expectations have been raised for them by previous stage appearances—except Chremes—the audience can concentrate on their positions in the debate: these characters exist literally for the sake of argument alone and have relatively little stake in or consequence for the larger plot. Here is the lively debate and exchange of ideas that we might have expected to find in

48 Huber 1974, 242.

49 Huber 1974, 248–49.

50 No characters are identified in the manuscripts; in fact the entire *Ecclesiazusae* is particularly chaotic in the attribution of lines to speakers; Lowe 1962, 27 and Lowe 1967, 66–71.

51 The name "Chremes" becomes typical in New Comedy, and appears here for the first time: Gelzer 1970, 1499.

the *agôn*: Chremes follows the laws of the women's government, the Dissident follows the law of self-interest and refuses to surrender his property.

The position that the Dissident takes, though not of any particular philosophical depth or consistency, nevertheless echoes a theme common in Greek sophistic thought: the argument from self-interest (see above, p. 17). While it is true that selfishness is a hallmark of several Aristophanic comic heroes (one thinks of Dicaeopolis or Peisetaerus),[52] nevertheless the Dissident's vociferous contempt for the laws is so thorough that it rings of something more serious. His initial stance is to take a "wait and see" attitude:

> ...ἀλλὰ βασανιῶ
> πρώτιστον αὐτὰ πολλάκις καὶ σκέψομαι.
> οὐ γὰρ τὸν ἐμὸν ἱδρῶτα καὶ φειδωλίαν
> οὐδὲν πρὸς ἔπος οὕτως ἀνοήτως ἐκβαλῶ
> πρὶν ἐκπύθωμαι πᾶν τὸ πρᾶγμ' ὅπως ἔχει.

> First of all I'll examine the situation many times and I'll take a look. For I won't waste my sweat and earnings so foolishly for nothing, until I make a full inquiry into the whole affair.
>
> *Eccl.* 748–752

He repeatedly emphasizes his intention of delaying (788, 790). Yet this should not be confused with simple quietism. In the Dissident's eyes to obey the law as Chremes does is a sign of foolishness (751, 762, 765) whereas the prudent person (σώφρονα, 767) evidently will disobey.

One of the reasons he gives for his hesitation was probably a compelling one in the eyes of the Athenian audience. These laws are not to be obeyed, says the Dissident, because they are temporary decisions of the notoriously fickle Athenian assembly. We have seen that Athenians made a distinction in the 390's between *nomoi*, permanent laws that were accorded a great degree of respect as being part of the "ancestral" constitution (*patrios politeia*), and the decrees of the assembly that were regarded as temporary, often called *dedogmena* or *psêphismata* (p. 15). When Chremes calls them *nomoi*, the Dissident is quick to elicit from him their precise nature:

> Χρ. τί δ'; οὐχὶ πειθαρχεῖν με τοῖς νόμοισι δεῖ;
> Αν. ποίοισιν, ὦ δύστηνε; Χρ. τοῖς δεδογμένοις.
> Αν. δεδογμένοισιν; ὡς ἀνόητος ἦσθ' ἄρα.

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[52] See Dover's remarks on self-assertion (1972, 31–41).

Chremes: What? Shouldn't I obey the *nomoi*?
Dissident: What sort of laws, my poor fellow?
Chremes: The decrees.
Dissident: The decreed laws? Then how foolish you were!
Eccl. 762–64

The Dissident later suggests to Chremes that the assembly is always changing its mind (797–798), that a few bad omens would be enough to make the Athenians think twice about obeying (791–93) and he lumps the new laws together with *psêphismata* of which he gives several examples (812–29); this ploy undermines the moral authority of the new laws, and makes the Dissident seem almost enlightened. Yet this argument is a means to an immoral end; it is a pretext for selfishness. The *psêphismata* may be relative but the only higher law that he seems to support is that of self-interest. The only "ancestral" law is that of acquisition:[53]

Αν. οἴσειν δοκεῖς τιν' ὅστις αὐτῶν νοῦν ἔχει;
οὐ γὰρ πάτριον τοῦτ' ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ λαμβάνειν
ἡμᾶς μόνον δεῖ νὴ Δία· καὶ γὰρ οἱ θεοί.
γνώσει δ' ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν γε τῶν ἀγαλμάτων
ὅταν γὰρ εὐχώμεσθα διδόναι τἀγαθά,
ἕστηκεν ἐκτείνοντα τὴν χεῖρ' ὑπτίαν,
οὐχ ὥς τι δώσοντ' ἀλλ' ὅπως τι λήψεται.

Dissident: Do you think that anyone with intelligence will bring his property [in order to give it up]? This [giving] is not the ancestral custom (*patrion*); instead, by Zeus, it is necessary that we take, just like the gods. You can tell from the hands of the statues: when we pray that he give good things, he stretches out his hand palm up, not as if to give, but to take.
Eccl. 777–783

Rather than a higher, enlightened standard of justice he espouses personal gain. He never argues for a return to male rule; he never claims the new laws were illegally enacted. Although there is no question of a relationship between ruler and ruled here, one is reminded of the Athenians at Melos (Thucydides 5.85–111) who ignore standards of justice and assert that the strong do what they have power to do (esp. 5.89). The Dissident, in arguing that taking is sanctioned by ancestral custom and divine practice, does not quite assert that it is a law of nature (*physis*), which was of course a favorite sophistic line of reasoning that was

[53] I follow Ussher's text, but line attribution is troublesome in this speech, as Newiger 1968, 122–3, points out.

taken by Antiphon and Callicles as well as the Athenians at Melos.[54] If we need not identify him with a specific sophistic viewpoint the general tenor of his case should be clear. He is an opportunist who is guided by self-interest, and will try to take advantage of the free meal.

The Dissident's selfish inclinations are matched by his aggressive debating tactics; he is the anti-type of Praxagora, whose verbal skills were put to the loftier purpose of improving the lot of the city as a whole. Exhilarated by a whiff of the smoke of battle, he does not hesitate to show his scorn for Chremes' obedience, frequently mocking Chremes' very words by sarcastically repeating them.

Χρ. τί γὰρ ἄλλο γ' ἢ φέρειν παρεσκευασμένοι
τὰ χρήματ' εἰσίν; Αν. ἀλλ' ἰδὼν ἐπειθόμην.
Χρ. λέγουσι γοῦν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς. Αν. λέξουσι γάρ.
Χρ. καί φασιν οἴσειν ἀράμενοι. Αν. φήσουσι γάρ.
Χρ. ἀπολεῖς ἀπιστῶν πάντ'. Αν. ἀπιστήσουσι γάρ.
Χρ. ὁ Ζεύς σέ γ' ἐπιτρίψειεν. Αν. ἐπιτρίψουσι γάρ.

Chremes: But everyone's ready to turn in his goods.
The only conceivable consensus.
Dissident: Seeing's believing; I haven't seen a sign of it yet.
Chremes: They're saying it on every street in the City.
Dissident: Say it, they would.
Chremes: They pledge to deliver in person.
Dissident: Pledge it, they would.
Chremes: Your irony's wearing me down.
Dissident: Iron it, they would.
Chremes: May god damn you to hell.
Dissident: Damn it, they would.

Eccl. 771–776, tr. Parker

The rapid rejoinders, in *antilabe* (also at 799–803), put Chremes on the defensive. The Dissident's goal is less to persuade Chremes than it is to ridicule him. His arguments are "tricky," complains Chremes (δεινὰ λέγειν, 812); he is precisely the sort of person who would use verbal facility for self-serving purposes.

It is unlikely that the audience would have sympathized with the Dissident. While very few Athenians would defend the virtues of poverty,

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[54] In the fragment of the *On Truth* (DK 44A) Antiphon says that the demands of the laws are artificial, but the demands of nature are necessary: see Moulton 1972, 336–39; Callicles sees *nomoi* as contrivances by the weak to protect themselves (Plato *Gorgias* 483b); in general see Guthrie 1971, 84–113.

as the goddess Poverty tries to do in the *Plutus*, they would readily concede that wealth could "breed insolence."[55] In spite of his objection that surrendering poverty to the state is not prudent (σώφρων), the Dissident conspicuously suffers from what Greeks regarded as a lack of self-control (*akrasia*) and is thus vulnerable to hunger and sexual desire. We note that food and *erôs* are assimilated to one another in the announcement in this scene that the banquet is ready: Smoios "licks a dish" 847.[56] After this announcement he is considerably less restrained about his desire to sneak in.

Admittedly, the audience must see the law-abiding Athenians as foolish in one sense: they have been deceived by the disguised wives into forfeiting their property. Yet Chremes' neighbors evidently do not regard the new arrangements as *psêphismata* that are to be ignored; they are obeying the law (805–6). It should be recalled that one of Praxagora's arguments had been that instituting the rule of women would mean a return to a more traditional, stable form of government (214–240, 446–54). Women, after all, never have overthrown the democracy (μὴ καταλύειν τὸν δῆμον, 453). Whether the Dissident will really get a free meal is unclear in the play, though I suspect that his fate will be similar to that of the young man in the following scene: disobedience is punished appropriately.

In the final analysis Chremes' obedience is far less foolish than the Dissident's arrogance is objectionable. The Dissident may have the fascination of being the devil's advocate, and Chremes' sense of duty emerges by comparison as less interesting; his position resembles the one frequently taken by the chorus in Greek drama: a mouthpiece for communal values. Yet he still is not quite as helpless as, say, Right Logic in the *Clouds*. He holds his ground, and we sense that justice is on his side when he repeatedly warns the Dissident that he cannot go to the banquet without first depositing his property (856–71). Here Chremes even turns the Dissident's technique of sarcastic interruption against him (862–865).

In the end, no one is persuaded; if anything, they only harden their positions in this stalemate. The Dissident in no way carries the day; in his arguments he only proves what Praxagora had said in her speech: that men are in danger of being more interested in their own welfare than in that of the city.

The scene is not only about the merits of the scheme; it also raises issues about debate and persuasion itself. I suggest that the *peithô* used by the two antagonists in this act was incomplete precisely because it had no

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[55] ὑβρίζειν, *Plutus* 565; Dover 1974, 110.

[56] For the *double-entendres* see Ruck 1975, 29 and n. 84.

seductive element. What *does* inspire the Dissident has come in a speech that is delivered with erotic overtones by a girl. Unfortunately Chremes lacks Praxagora's seductive powers in defending Praxagora's scheme. He is unable to harness the enticements of *erôs* or the wiles of *dolos* in his attempt to channel the motives of self-interest toward obedience to law. The vocabulary and argumentation in this episode remain strictly on a political level and the scene is inconclusive. The men are, by themselves, unable to reach any political consensus; neither persuades the other. The Dissident may be a skillful speaker or debater in a limited sense but he is without persuasive effect.

E) *The dispute about sexual rights (877–1111)*

This episode, illustrating the consequences of giving first choice in lovers to the old and ugly, includes several incidents: a young woman and an ugly old woman engage in a contest (partly in song) to lay claim to a young man; the young woman temporarily tricks the old woman into leaving the stage and the young pair sing a love duet; the old woman returns, drives off the young girl, and claims the young man for herself; finally two more old women arrive to assert their rights as well. The young girl, to whom the boy is attracted, has the weakest legal claim and the three old women are quick to cite the letter of the law on this; they are, however, completely unpersuasive and certainly not seductive in trying to win the affections of the young man. They must resort to force (*bia*) with farcical consequences.

In certain ways this recapitulates the last episode: a man determined to circumvent the laws is pitted against representatives of the legal order. This time the anonymous old women serve as agents of the law, and no ambiguity clouds the question of whether the young man will get away with his transgressions. Once again, no mediator is present to reconcile the clash or private motivations, and selfish desires run away with themselves. If in the last episode the fundamental motivation was greed, here it is *erôs*. The bizarre new law is sure to unleash basic human desires, yet since it has been triggered by the political system, the dispute will in part take place on a political level and indeed the old women will use legalistic language and arguments from justice (δίκαιον) in attempting to win their case.

The short preliminary scene (877–937) between the young woman and the old woman anticipates the strategies that the women will use in trying to get the man. The old woman, who within moments of arriving on stage

calls on the Muse for a song, will try to rely on verbal persuasion.[57] Of course being the less attractive of the two—the best she can offer is "skill" and experience to a lover (895–96)—she has made generous use of make-up (878–79). In fact this complements rhetoric; both rhetoric and make-up are contrivances that can distort and conceal. Quintilian said that excessive figures of rhetoric were like depilatories, curling irons and cosmetics; the simple style, on the other hand, was like a woman without trappings.[58] Similarly the young girl,[59] while not without verbal ability, will offer enticements that rely less on artifice and more on tangible and immediate pleasures: "Softness grows on my tender thighs and it blossoms on my breasts" (901–3). Understandably the young man is more receptive to the girl's allurements and it becomes plain in the duet that they sing to one another (952–75) that the attraction is physical. She sings of his locks of hair (955) and he of her bosom and bottom (964–5).[60] They both repeat an identical refrain ("I beg you Eros, make this one come to my bed," 958–59 = 967–68) that reflects their mutual desire.[61] He concludes the duet:

> ὦ χρυσοδαίδαλτον ἐμὸν μέλημα, Κύπριδος ἔρνος,
> μέλιττα Μούσης, Χαρίτων θρέμμα, Τρυφῆς πρόσωπον,
> ἄνοιξον, ἀσπάζου με.
>
> Delight of mine, fashioned of gold, offspring of Kypris,
> honey of the Muse, child of the Graces, face of Delicacy,
> open, embrace me.
>
> *Eccl.* 973–74

The verses echo Ibycus (*PMG* 288):

> Εὐρύαλε γλαυκέων Χαρίτων θάλος
> καλλικόμων μελέδημα, σὲ μὲν Κύπρις
> ἅ τ' ἀγανοβλέφαρος Πειθὼ ῥοδέοισιν ἐν ἄνθεσι θρέψαν.

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[57] Cavallini 1983, 133–34, identifies echoes of Sappho in their songs.

[58] See above, p. 36 and n. 66. Quintilian 2.5.12 and Cicero *Orator* 23.78–9; Wiseman 1979, 3–8; Lichtenstein 1987, 78–79.

[59] I assume that none of the women is a courtesan: Gelzer 1970, 1497.

[60] Henderson 1974, 344–47 and 1975, 140, suggests "cunt" and bottom. No artifice or cosmetic intervenes here!

[61] The song parodies popular-style songs, or may be a popular song written by Aristophanes for the occasion: Bowra 1958; Silk 1970, 148–50. A popular song such as this could have been detached from its context and sung independently: Dover 1972, 194 n. 6.

Euryalos, child of the exquisite Graces
and darling of the lovely-haired Muses,
you were reared by Kypris and soft-eyed Peitho
among the blossoms of the rose.

tr. Barnstone

We cannot know whether Peitho consciously prompted the borrowing, but Peitho is certainly the force lurking behind the distinctly erotic encounter and the duet. Words alone will be impotent; only *bia* can match *erôs*. The young man says as much at the end of the song: "And yet these words have been spoken in moderation compared to my need (ἀνάγκη, 969–70)."[62] The couple share a genuine *erôs* against which the following scene with the old women (976–1111) stands out more sharply; the girl makes the hags look all the uglier.[63]

Although the action on stage might be described as an attempted seduction, the language the old women use is political. Their desires are announced in the vocabulary of the court and assembly; the youth responds similarly. The first old woman seems to be using the language of the law courts when she says, "According to the law (νόμος) it is right (δίκαιον) to do these things, if we are under a democracy" (εἰ δημοκρατούμεθα, 945).[64] The youth fends off the old woman's advances by pretending to be an *eisagogeus*, an official who set limits on the monetary value of cases to be heard in court, but the youth translates monetary value into terms of age. He is thus not introducing the "cases" (read "women") over sixty, but is willing to introduce those under twenty (982–4).[65] When the young man refuses to go along, the first woman announces that she has the decree (*psêphisma*) with her:

Νε. ἐγὼ δὲ ταῖς γε τηλικαύταις ἄχθομαι,
κοὐκ ἂν πιθοίμην οὐδέποτ'. Γρ. ἀλλά, νὴ Δία,
ἀναγκάσει τουτί σε. Νε. τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ τί;
Γρ. ψήφισμα, καθ' ὅ σε δεῖ βαδίζειν ὡς ἐμέ.

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[62] See Ussher 1973, 210–11, on this.

[63] Gross places the scene in the tradition of similar scenes of seduction in Greek literature; Gross 1985, 51–3.

[64] See Ussher 1975, 207.

[65] Ussher 1973, 213; van Leeuwen 1905 sees an ambiguity in εἰσάγειν: "introduce" into court or bed? Note also the youth's use of the term ὁ βουλόμενος (987) which is formulaic in law. Later the youth tries to get out of his obligation by claiming that she has no right to him because she has not paid her *pentakosiastês* (1007, apparently a tax) to the city. Ussher 1973, 216, suggests that it is a tax, although Huber sees no clear reference here.

Young Man: I'm disgusted with old women your age and would never consent.
First Woman: By Zeus this will force you.
Young Man: What's this?
First Woman: The decree (ψήφισμα) according to which you are obligated to come in.

Eccl. 1010–1013

She proceeds to read him the law itself (1015ff.), which follows closely the formulaic wording of a decree passed by the assembly.[66]

ἔδοξε ταῖς γυναιξίν, ἢν ἀνὴρ νέος
νέας ἐπιθυμῇ, μὴ σποδεῖν αὐτὴν πρὶν ἂν
τὴν γραῦν προκρούσῃ πρῶτον.

Be it decreed by the women: that if a young
man desires young women, he may not fornicate with her until
he first bangs an old woman in advance.

Eccl. 1015–1017

The young girl tries to rescue the youth, but she too grapples with the problem in terms of the *nomos* (1041) that they face, pointing out that if young men sleep with old women there may be incest and they will fill the world with Oedipuses. She has hit on a truth of sorts: it may not have been the intent of Praxagora's law to let older citizens sleep with ones who might be their children; that would be incestuous.[67] Subsequently the second old woman enters, pulls rank on the first, and begins to drag the young man off, not only referring to the *nomos* but also citing the "letter of the law" (γράμματα εἰρηκότα, 1050).[68] The scene, then, ends with a young man being dragged off stage by physical force, kicking and screaming, a helpless victim. Ἀνάγκη, which initially described his own sexual drive (969), now becomes the necessity of obedience to the law (1006, 1012, 1029).[69] The women have resorted to physical force (*bia*) or, here, ἀνάγκη.

Yet several times the women claim that verbal power alone is the force that bends the youth to their will. Clearly this is not the case: he has not

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[66] Lacking only *probouleuma*, as Huber 1974, *ad loc.*, notes.

[67] Ussher 1973, 220.

[68] The phrase is used of the law (*nomos*) at Plato *Politicus* 293a; van Leeuwen 1905, 142, thinks she has memorized a written text. Possibly a written text would carry more weight; Garner 1987, 136–140, notes the importance of written law in the fourth century.

[69] We recall the remarks of Themistocles, who, threatening the Andrians with siege, said that the Athenians had two goddesses they could invoke: Peitho and Ananke (Herodotus 8.111; see above, p. 31).

been enticed into complying with the old woman's wishes; he is being physically seized. The women are euphemistic about this; the force of law or of words works in concert with physical compulsion. The power that Gorgias attributed to speech—that it is able to compel (ἀναγκάζειν) the hearer—is precisely what the women would like to claim for themselves.[70] The *Ecclesiazusae* simply reverses the *Encomium of Helen* in that it is women who have physical power and a man is their quarry. We have already seen that the first old woman announced that the decree will force (ἀναγκάσει, 1012) the man to obey. The second woman claimed a similar tangible power of this sort for her words when she said, "It is not I, but the νόμος that is dragging you," (1055) using a rhetorical formula found in Lysias.[71]

Similarly the girl's argument that the law, by sanctioning incest, will create Oedipuses has an unmistakable effect in that it undermines the first old woman's claims to legality. This ingenious argument outrages the old woman, who complains that the girl has invented this argument (λόγος, 1043) out of spite, and leaves the stage. Evidently the *logos* alone has assumed enough power to force an opponent off stage, though we may safely assume that some pushing and shoving accompanied this. The scene recalls the incident on the floor of the Senate in 1859 when Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina severely beat the abolitionist Charles Sumner with a gold-headed cane; one of Brooks's admirers sent him a new cane on which was inscribed, "Use knock-down arguments."[72] The girl, however, is defeated by the second old woman, who is surer yet of the strength of the law (calling it νόμος and γράμματα εἰρηκότα, never ψήφισμα).

The interpretation of this episode depends on whether the audience's sympathies are with or against the young man. The young man and woman may be breaking the law, but their love is something that seems natural and understandable. Here is genuine, reciprocated erotic attraction; it may be the first scene in surviving Greek comedy to show a pair of romantically involved lovers. No exact precedent in Old Comedy comes to mind: Myrrhine is avoiding Kinesias in the *Lysistrata* (845–979); the romantic lovers of New Comedy meanwhile are to be traced to Euripidean

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[70] *Encomium of Helen* 12; for the affinity of Aeschylus, Gorgias and Aristophanes on the tangible power of words see Walsh 1984, Chapter Five.

[71] The husband in Lysias 1, catching an adulterer in bed with his wife, says, "It is not I who am going to kill you, but our city's law (νόμος), which you have transgressed. . ." (tr. Lamb, Lysias 1.26); see Ussher 1973 on 1054. The sophistic argument resembles *Medea* 500ff.: "It was not you but Aphrodite who saved me."

[72] McPherson 1988, 151.

tragedy, not Old Comedy—one thinks of Euripides' *Helen*. If "boy-gets-girl" is not an established pattern in comedy at this time, there is no reason to feel a pattern has been broken and that the boy has a right to get the girl. The old women, on the other hand, who are physically repulsive (940, 1052–3, 1068–70), have a long literary and mythological tradition behind them. Indeed they resemble the nightmare figures and witches in Greek literature who destroy men: the Sphinx, Moirai, Erinyes, Sirens; the erotic context could also suggest a parody of the choice of Paris.[73] The episode—the three women selfishly fighting among themselves for the one man—may also be a parody of the three Graiai. Needless to say they do not excite interest from the young man.

Nevertheless, however unattractive the women may be, the audience is unlikely to be persuaded that the young man is a model of good behavior or of moral authority. However pathetic he appears at the end of his scene, he has known very well from the beginning that he is breaking the rules (934–41) and has behaved with arrogance. In fact, as Sommerstein suggests, it is improbable that the audience would have felt sympathy for any young man in Old Comedy: self-righteous and cocksure, Aristophanes' aim is to take them down a peg; young men are banished (the father-beater of the *Birds* comes to mind), while old men are rewarded with rejuvenation.[74] Henderson has defended the old women at some length: women's actions in Aristophanes are generally motivated by a desire to help the city and these are no different. Moreover, far from being witches, they may have become widows during the Peloponnesian War and are entitled to respect.[75]

McLeish has pointed out that the old women preserve the dignity of their language, while the young man utters bawdy.[76] The old women represent the force of law and are, it might be suggested, the comic equivalent of the witches in *MacBeth* who, insists Terry Eagleton half-facetiously, are the heroines of the play: they, in the end, release thoughts of ambition in MacBeth and expose the self-deceptions of society.[77] Likewise in this episode of the *Ecclesiazusae* the old women are the instruments for provoking arrogance and lust and for meting out punishment, and in that respect we must grant them some positive value.

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[73] Saïd 1979, 59; see further Gould 1980, 56; Demand 1982, 179. The young man is, of course, brought to death's door ("Bury me," 1107); could it be a bizarre reversal of the Persephone myth?

[74] Sommerstein 1984a, 320–321.

[75] Henderson 1987b, 118–19, 127–28.

[76] McLeish 1980, 99.

[77] Eagleton 1986, 2.

"Our laws (νόμοι) must be obeyed (πειστεόν, 1022)," insists the first woman. Nevertheless, although they follow and enforce Praxagora's laws, they represent failures of persuasion or seduction and thus are anti-types to Praxagora: their make-up notwithstanding, they lack Praxagora's erotic appeal and their predictable failure to win the young man's consent is of comic proportions. The young girl, whose erotic desirability reminds us of Praxagora, nevertheless is the victim of superior physical force.

F) *The feast and exodos*

No more disputes or arguments emerge in this last scene; the mood is one of reconciliation. The ending is in keeping with the fantasy of wish-fulfillment that one finds elsewhere in Aristophanes, with promises of wine, food, and sex, the elements usually found together in a festive ending—indeed they are elements that are sometimes difficult to separate.[78] The serving girl who is trying to find Blepyrus is, propitiously, wearing myrrh (1117), which Praxagora had said she wore when visiting a lover (525).

But the ending has other, more serious purposes as well. Blepyrus' return, with a girl on either arm (1138), completes (as we saw above, pp. 56–59) his "rejuvenation." Furthermore his return stands in marked contrast to the disobedience of the Dissident and the young man; it thus restores the moral order of Praxagora. Justice has been done. In the last scene the young man was punished by being forced to serve the sexual needs of old women; in this scene an old man is rewarded with the company of young women.[79] He has dutifully accompanied his wife and has been conspicuously unselfish—we know this because he is the last to eat (1133).

If the last scene has a rhetorical strategy it is aimed not at any character in the play but at the audience and judges. Now it is the playwright's turn to win their hearts and votes:

> καὶ τῶν θεατῶν εἴ τις εὔνους τυγχάνει,
> καὶ τῶν κριτῶν εἰ μή τις ἑτέρωσε βλέπει,
> ἴτω μεθ' ἡμῶν πάντα γὰρ παρέξομεν.

[78] In the *Peace* Trygaeus marries Opora (literally "Harvest-time"). Similarly, courtesans, little more than sex-objects in Old Comedy, were often likened to food (Henry 1985, 28).

[79] If this latecomer is not Blepyrus but Chremes, the point is the same: an obedient citizen is rewarded.

If someone of the spectators happens to be well disposed,
or if someone of the judges does not turn his eyes elsewhere,
then come with us, for we will offer everything!

Eccl. 1141–43

Blepyrus bestows upon them the same gifts and benefactions that Blepyrus had received from Praxagora: wine and women. The appeal for their favor also resorts to an erotic analogy. The *Ecclesiazusae* had, by lot, been assigned to go first in the dramatic contest, with the result that Aristophanes was afraid that the judges would have forgotten the play when the time came to make a judgement. The chorus asks them not to behave like the bad courtesans (ἑταῖραι) who remember only their last customers (1161–62), thus acknowledging for a final time the kinship of persuasion and *erôs*.

G) *Conclusions*

Almost every work of literature is organized around conflict and eventual resolution of that conflict, whether through persuasion, deception or outright violence. When these occur in the *Ecclesiazusae*, however, they frequently do so in terms of the issues raised by *peithô*, *erôs* and politics. Certainly the interpretation put forth here does not explain every fact in the play—there is enough in the play to support any number of theses. I suspect that the critical principle that one must "insist on accounting for every scene in the play on a single hypothesis"[80] is probably an unrealistic one for Aristophanes. Whitman noted that Aristophanes' mind was "over-fertile in the invention of fantastic devices, which quite overwhelm literal consistency."[81] Yet one is justified in trying to identify *some* consistency. The interpretation of the *Ecclesiazusae* that I am offering may seem rather abstract, but the episodic action and the anonymity of many characters invite the belief that the characters and action exist for the sake of a thematic idea. Huber suggested that the play is "problem-centered" not "person-centered"; the interest is with the issues at stake.[82]

On a general level *peithô* is the force in the play that works toward resolution and reconciliation: Praxagora wins the support of Blepyrus and Chremes. Yet it is obvious that that there is no such reconciliation in the two sub-plots about property rights and sexual prerogatives; *peithô*, even when attempted, is an abysmal if amusing failure in the absence of

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[80] Kovacs 1980, 2.
[81] Whitman 1964, 209.
[82] Huber 1974, 239–248.

Praxagora. The conclusion is pessimistic: *peithô* is not automatically effective as a conciliatory force. *Peithô* turns out to be a light thing after all, as Dionysus said in the *Frogs* (1396). In this sense the play contravenes the pattern set in the *Oresteia*, where the power of persuasion was confirmed when the Furies gradually softened their opposition and accepted a peaceful role in Athens. The trilogy discarded the ugly, destructive Peitho that was the daughter of Ruin (*Agamemnon*, 385), and embraced Athena's *peithô* in the *Eumenides* (see pp. 33–34). But in the *Ecclesiazusae*, although persuasion was originally associated with Praxagora, a ludicrous travesty of *peithô* replaces her in the penultimate episodes. The three hags embody the destructive *peithô* that uses, as Aeschylus said, force (βιᾶται, *Agamemnon* 385). Moreover in the *Agamemnon* Paris was said to have been compelled to commit his crime; similarly we might then see, in the youth of the *Ecclesiazusae* who is dragged off by the hags, a Paris helpless in the face of an overwhelming power. Of course Paris found Helen more congenial than the youth does the hags: the difference between tragedy and comedy, no doubt.

The *Ecclesiazusae* thus shows us two opposite poles: the Praxagorean world of articulate feminine wit and seductive persuasion, and a non-Praxagorean world, dominated by brute force and farcical self-interest. The absence of Praxagora's special power in the later scenes disrupts the lives of both men and women: whereas the beginning of the play showed how Praxagora, with her combination of abilities, organized and set the women into action, we see this unanimity disintegrating in the episode of the old women, who are fighting among themselves and using *bia* to get the young man. If the men in the earlier scenes of the play (Blepyrus and the speakers at the *ekklêsia*) were shown to be merely inept and ineffective, the performance of men in the argument about property showed them even less capable of reaching any consensus among themselves.

I suggest, then, that we understand these scenes of the play as an illustration of the failure of a political discourse that lacks the full efficacy of *peithô*, an efficacy that requires an element of *erôs*. As we have seen, the argument between the two men—which was barren of rhetorically seductive allurements—is inconclusive, and the true *erôs* between the young man and woman was thwarted by the three old hags demanding their rights. The level of discourse comically deteriorates as the play progresses: the two men argue inconclusively but non-violently about property, and then the old women not only argue among themselves about their privileges but even resort to violence—the discredited '*idéologie de la puissance.*' The law alone is not enough to command obedience; without the personal presence of Praxagora private motivations arise. If Lysistrata had left the acropolis long before her play was

over, the result would surely have been remarkably similar. It may be asking too much of human nature to expect better. After all, both the *Oresteia* and *Philoctetes* required super-human presences (Athena and Heracles) to make agreements stick.

And yet, *peithô* is the best means available of winning consent and public trust. Admittedly Praxagora resorts to deception in her disguise and Leo Strauss admiringly regards her, like every good ruler, as a "benevolent deceiver,"[83] but after the first scenes of the play she drops the disguise and argues in a frank manner. Her deceit is temporary, and in any event morally more acceptable than that of Odysseus in the *Philocetes*. Supporters of the law (Chremes and the old women) may be neither articulate nor attractive, but opponents (the Dissident and young couple) are punished and the ideal of obedience—a moral center for the audience—remains. Aristophanes is cognizant of the power of self-interest and individualism and realizes how difficult it is to assure the participation and obedience of the *dêmos*, still valued highly in Athens. Proper persuasion becomes essential. Aristophanes would at least agree with Gorgias in Plato's dialogue that rhetoric and persuasion are morally neutral (*Gorgias* 456d–457c), and perhaps would admit with Isocrates that an illustrious orator can bring blessings to the city (15.231). Guthrie's description of the position taken by *Crito* may be appropriate: "The *nomoi* of a city represent justice in it until a wise man or good orator persuade it otherwise, for the reason that contravention of the laws, whether violent or not, would undermine society, and society was necessary for man's survival."[84] The *Ecclesiazusae* offers the positive model of Praxagora, who establishes herself as a salutary leader and wins the support of members of the *dêmos* for the new government, and the negative model of the selfish citizens, who are looked upon with disfavor. The play is a plea for the "good orator" whose *peithô* is the best way to achieve public stability.

Unfortunately we can only speculate about the persuasion that the playwright exercises on his audience. I have said above that the best persuasion develops in terms of its audience, and since we know so little about the audience—it would hardly be univocal anyway—it is impossible to decide what the appropriate rhetorical strategies are. Whereas the makeup of the juries of the law courts may have been somewhat poorer and the citizens at the *ekklêsia* more wealthy, orators could contrive

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[83] Strauss 1966, 264.

[84] Guthrie 1975, 98; for a somewhat different approach, allowing for civil disobedience, see Kraut 1984.

arguments appropriate to the interests of either group.[85] Public business was suspended on festival days and all classes would be present at the theater; a crudely partisan appeal would have lost Aristophanes his audience. It is reasonable to suppose that the audience was unsympathetic to the Dissident and the young man; after the bitter experiences of 403, the audience knew all too well the dangers of lack of obedience to the law.

Aristophanes' satire of selfishness and his warning of the danger to the city of inadequate *peithô* in political discourse touches on a fundamental problem in Greek political thought: how can the citizenry be persuaded to act for a larger good? For Plato, similarly, *peithô* is usually preferable to *bia*. When he lists, among the weaknesses of the timocratic state, the use of force in education instead of persuasion (*Republic* 548a), he implies by contrast that the guardians *do* use persuasion.[86] The goal had already been stated by Pericles: in order to win consent the leader must be able "to see what ought to be done and to express clearly what he sees" (Thucydides 2.60). In the next chapter we look more carefully at the role of Praxagora, the leader who must rely on self-expression.

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[85] Sinclair 1988, 123–34, 133–35.
[86] Warman 1983, 49–50; see also Morrow 1953.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRAXAGORA, WOMEN AND RHETORIC

We have seen that the spheres of *erôs* and politics overlap in the realm of *peithô* and that *peithô* is frequently associated with women. Consequently Praxagora, whom Aristophanes depicts both as a persuasive politician and as a woman capable of seduction, deserves special attention. Her double role upholds the relationship between politics and *erôs* and suggests that she is an agent of *peithô* in this play. It is she who serves as a model for the good orator, trained in words, who can guide the city by attempting to establish shared values, and establishes patterns for heroines in later comedy. Before looking more closely at Praxagora, however, an examination of other Greek attitudes about politicians and rhetoric becomes unavoidable. The portrayal of Praxagora can best be understood against the backdrop of the motif of the *erômenos*.

A) Rhêtores *and* erôs

There was a scurrilous but persistent notion in classical Athens that the best politician was, in his youth, the object of homosexual attention: he was the adolescent *erômenos*, the passive, "feminine" partner, sought by the *erastês*, the active, older, partner. Of course it should be said that pederasty in classical Greece could be a positive association of male bonding, not merely sexual but also educational, and the *erastês* was thought of as winning the love of his *erômenos* by his value as an exemplar and by the patience, devotion, and skill which he displayed in training the *erômenos*.[1] Plato set the relationship between teacher and student in an ambience of homosexual *erôs*. Alcibiades, to choose one example, was depicted in the *Symposium* as an *erômenos* of Socrates (216c–219e). Of course Alcibiades departs from the norm because, although he desired to be the *erômenos*, he was forced by Socrates' reticence to become more active, a figurative *erastês* seeking the *erôs* of Socrates, who, in turn, would have the student love not the teacher but the philosophy he teaches. Thus, for Plato, the arousal of reflection draws on the same sources which animate our sexual nature.[2]

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[1] Dover 1978, 202.

[2] Similarly admirers of Gorgias were said to be figurative *erastai*. See Dover 1978, 151–8; Brown and Coulter 1971, 415–17; Halperin 1986, 60–80.

Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* offers one explanation for this supposed trait of politicians. "Aristophanes" has been describing how each human being was originally half of a whole that has been split and is now looking for the other, lost half; some pairs are male, which accounts for homosexuality:

> ὅσοι δὲ ἄρρενος τμῆμά εἰσι, τὰ ἄρρενα διώκουσι, καὶ τέως μὲν ἂν παῖδες ὦσιν, ἅτε τεμάχια ὄντα τοῦ ἄρρενος, φιλοῦσι τοὺς ἄνδρας καὶ χαίρουσι συγκατακείμενοι καὶ συμπεπλεγμένοι τοῖς ἀνδράσι, καί εἰσιν οὗτοι βέλτιστοι τῶν παίδων καί μειρακίων, ἅτε ἀνδρειότατοι ὄντες φύσει. φασὶ δὲ δή τινες αὐτοὺς ἀναισχύντους εἶναι, ψευδόμενοι· οὐ γὰρ ὑπ' ἀναισχυντίας τοῦτο δρῶσιν ἀλλ' ὑπὸ θάρρους καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ ἀρρενωπίας, τὸ ὅμοιον αὐτοῖς ἀσπαζόμενοι. μέγα δὲ τεκμήριον· καὶ γὰρ τελεωθέντες μόνοι ἀποβαίνουσιν εἰς τὰ πολιτικὰ ἄνδρες οἱ τοιοῦτοι.
>
> Those who are slices of the male follow the male, and while they are boys, inasmuch as they are slices of the male, they love men and like lying beside men and being embraced by men, and these are the best of the boys and youths, because they are by nature the most virile.
>
> Now some say that they are shameless, but those who say this are wrong. For the boys do not do this out of shamelessness but out of daring, courage and manliness, and they are glad to see their own kind. And the striking proof is that it is only such boys who, when grown up, turn into real men in politics.
>
> *Symposium* 191e–192a

"Aristophanes" amusingly advances the fiction that pederasty produces a good politician; a male who had been made love to when young will turn out to be a capable politician when he is grown. Of course this is a ludicrous confusion of cause and effect; obviously pederasty will not guarantee a brilliant political career.[3] What would facilitate success in politics, however, is training in rhetoric and if the *erastês* was also a teacher then rhetoric and pederasty were implicitly assimilated. Moreover, this brings us to the two categories of caricature used by Aristophanes: (a) the *rhêtôr* as a young man or effeminate politician; (b) the *rhêtôr* as *erastês*. We will examine each category in turn.

Aristophanes associated pederasty with rhetorical training in his first

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[3] Dover 1966a, 45, sees Plato as inserting this as an intentional reminiscence of Aristophanes and this Aristophanic joke. We should note, though, that the joke need not have been exclusively Aristophanic, since it appears in other comic fragments, for some of these see below. See also Dover 1978, 142, on this passage.

play, the *Banqueters* (427 B.C.), where he apparently staged the education of two youths of whom one was called "chaste" (σώφρων), the other "buggered" (καταπύγων).[4] The latter, it appears, had been given a sophistic education; one fragment (205*PCG* = 198K) suggests that he has learned a neologism from the *rhêtores* and Alcibiades (Thrasymachus too is mentioned),[5] and depicts active speakers and politicians as still-handsome youths.[6] (Youthfulness alone has its attraction in a speaker: the young demagogue-to-be Huey Long "projected the same appealing image—a young, idealistic reformer who wanted to move the state forward.")[7] Ephippus *comicus*, in a fragment some fourteen lines long (14*PCG* = 14K), describes in some detail a young man (νεανίας) who stands up to give a speech and has a ληψιλογομίσθος τέχνη, a "skill in receiving pay for words," implying rhetorical training; the fragment seems to date from about 380 B.C. This attitude again assumes the affiliation of pederasty and politicians, but is usually more benign and does not explicitly refer to them as καταπύγονες.[8] In most of his comedies, however, Aristophanes focused less on the "educational" aspects of homosexual *erôs* than on the physical act. In Athens the active partner in a homosexual relationship was the one less ridiculed, whereas the passive partner, who played the woman's part in sexual relations, was singled out for scorn and disgrace. In fact a sexual relationship was conventionally an assertion of power, with the active forcing the passive partner into submission. Platonic *erôs*, which involves mutual, reciprocal participation, departs from this norm.[9] Especially degrading are insults aimed at a politician who is still, as a grown man, considered καταπύγων or

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[4] *Clouds* 528–536.

[5] For discussions of this fragment and of its place in the *Banqueters*, see Dover 1978, 143; Murphy 1938, 71; Norwood 1931, 276ff.; Cassio 1977, 32–36; Kassel and Austin 1984, 123.

[6] The chorus of the *Acharnians* (680ff.) complained about the νεανίσκοι ῥήτορες ("youthful speakers") who prosecute them. The passive partner, the βινούμενος, becomes a *rhêtôr* at *Knights* 877; cf. also the association of politics and youths at *Knights* 423–26.

[7] Williams 1969, 266.

[8] Note also the use of νεανιεύεσθαι to describe speakers; at *Gorgias* 482c4 it is used when someone "talks 'with boyish extravagance' like a regular mob orator"; cf. *Phaedrus* 234a6. It need not always be so benign, however: at *Wasps* 687 there is a μειράκιον κατάπυγον who seems to be a prosecutor: he gets the fee for an advocate (τὸ συνηγορικόν), and συνήγοροι and *rhêtores* were often the same people; see Hansen 1983, 46. Lanza 1979, 40–42, suggests that this feminization of the ability to speak implicitly condemns the corruption of public life.

[9] Dover 1978, 135ff. It should be remembered that the praise in the *Symposium* of the passive *erômenos* was in the mouth of the fictional *Platonic* "Aristophanes"; in the historical Aristophanes' plays it is generally insulting to be καταπύγων or εὐρύπρωκτος.

εὐρύπρωκτος.[10] Agyrrhius is the target of this in the *Ecclesiazusae.*[11]

The second type is the *rhêtôr* depicted as the active *erastês.* Cleon illustrates this best in his role in the *Knights*, which we discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 39–41): he was shown to be an *erastês* in pursuit of the personified Demos and his attempts to sway Demos were more a matter of seduction than of persuasion. Although, as we have seen, the active *erastês* was in principle more subject to shame than the passive *katapugôn*, the depiction of Cleon as an *erastês* exemplifies what Aristophanes saw as his destructive ambition and degrading flattery of the people.[12] Demos, on the other hand, has hardly chosen a worthy lover. Similarly, Socrates in the *Gorgias* compares Callicles' love of the Athenian *dêmos* with Callicles' love of the person Demos, son of Pyrilampes:

> αἰσθάνομαι οὖν σου ἑκάστοτε, καίπερ ὄντος δεινοῦ, ὅτι ἂν φῇ σου τά παιδικά καὶ ὅπως ἂν φῇ ἔχειν, οὐ δυναμένου ἀντιλέγειν, ἀλλ' ἄνω καὶ κάτω μεταβαλλομένου; ἔν τε τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐάν τι σοῦ λέγοντος ὁ δῆμος ὁ 'Αθηναίων μὴ φῇ οὕτως ἔχειν, μεταβαλλόμενος λέγεις ἃ ἐκεῖνος

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[10] The chorus of the *Acharnians* says that Alcibiades is "buggered and a chatterer" (εὐρύπρωκτος καὶ λάλος, 716), thereby ridiculing, simultaneously, his sexual mores and speaking ability. Even if the insult was warranted in Alcibiades' case, we hardly suspect that it was true of everyone caricatured as καταπύγων or εὐρύπρωκτος. In the *Clouds* Right is tricked by Wrong into admitting that everyone is εὐρύπρωκτος, not just the politicians (1089ff.)—a sweeping statement, to put it mildly.

[11] He is said to have been a woman himself (*Eccl.* 103); he had to steal a beard from a certain Pronomos, who, says the scholiast, was also εὐρύπρωκτος. We cannot be sure whether Pronomos was actually καταπύγων or not, and this may simply illustrate the scholiast's readiness to assume that he was. For the problems of such remarks in the scholia see Halliwell 1984b, 83–88. The remark about the beard prompted W.H. Hess to suggest that Praxagora, a woman disguised with a beard, was seen by the audience as representing Agyrrhius on stage (Hess 1963, 85). One woman, attempting to practice speaking, accidentally addressed the audience as women (ὦγυναῖκες, 165), because, she says, after glancing at Epigonus she thought she was addressing women. We do not know who Epigonus was (Ussher 1973, 98, speculates that he was a member of the *boule* sitting in the audience) but one may conclude with the scholiast that he was seen as μαλακός, "effeminate." During his constipation Blepyrus gives us another example: he calls out in agony for a doctor, and wonders who among the καταπρῶκτοι (Ussher's reading, with R and the Aldine) is δεινός in his τέχνη (364), suggesting Amynon as one candidate. The scholiast, however, suggests that Amynon is not a doctor but a ῥήτωρ ἡταιρηκώς, a "politician who keeps the company of men." See Dübner 1843, 318; Rutherford 1896, 531; Dover 1978, 20, discusses the significance of ἡταιρηκώς. If, as some commentators suggest (Ussher 1973 and Blaydes 1881 *ad loc.*), the καταπρῶκτοι are καταπύγονες, then it should come as no surprise that the *rhêtôr* has just as much concern for the πρωκτός as the doctor does, and Blepyrus' cry for help actually sets up an elaborate surprise: we expect a doctor but get a *rhêtôr.*

[12] Dover 1978, 138 n. 4. Elsewhere too the *erastês* has a political role, as we have seen (p. 38): Socrates, in Plato's *Alcibiades* I, fears that Alcibiades will destroy himself by becoming a δημεραστής, a "lover of the *dêmos*" (132a).

βούλεται, καὶ πρὸς τὸν Πυριλάμπους νεανίαν τὸν καλὸν τοῦτον τοιαῦτα ἕτερα πέπονθας. τοῖς γὰρ τῶν παιδικῶν βουλεύμασίν τε καὶ λόγοις οὐχ οἷός τ' εἶ ἐναντιοῦσθαι, ὥστε, εἴ τίς σου λέγοντος ἑκάστοτε ἃ διὰ τούτους λέγεις θαυμάζοι ὡς ἄτοπά ἐστιν, ἴσως εἴποις ἂν αὐτῷ εἰ βούλοιο τἀληθῆ λέγειν, ὅτι εἰ μή τις παύσει τὰ σὰ παιδικὰ τούτων τῶν λόγων, οὐδὲ σὺ παύσῃ ποτὲ ταῦτα λέγων.

Now I notice on every occasion that, clever though you may be, whatever your favorite says and however he describes things to be, you cannot contradict him, but constantly shift to and fro. In the assembly, if any statement of yours is contradicted by the Athenian *dêmos* you change about and say what it wishes, and you behave much the same toward the handsome young son of Pyrilampes. For you are incapable of resisting the words and designs of your favorite, with the result that if anyone should be astonished at the absurdities you utter again and again under their spell, you would probably say, if you were willing to tell the truth, that unless somebody stops your favorites from saying what they do, you yourself too will never stop speaking thus.

Gorgias 481d–e, tr. Woodhead

This passage raises an issue that we will return to below: however much the *rhêtôr* Callicles may be depicted as an *erastês*, it is clear that he is less the master than he is the slave of Demos. One expects the *erastês* to be the seducer and the *erômenos* the seduced, but the circumstance here is actually rather more ambiguous if not the reverse.

B) Rhêtores *and* erôs *in the* Ecclesiazusae

Thus a spectrum of stock attitudes was available to Aristophanes with which he could describe the relationship between *erôs* and politicians. These motifs are put to work for the women in the *Ecclesiazusae*: the women of Athens need to sneak into the assembly and vote themselves into power, but one woman asks how they will ever be convincing *rhêtores* if none of them have ever spoken in the assembly before.

Γυ. καὶ πῶς γυναικῶν θηλύφρων ξυνουσία
δημηγορήσει; Πρ. πολὺ μὲν οὖν ἄριστά που.
λέγουσι γὰρ καὶ τῶν νεανίσκων ὅσοι
πλεῖστα σποδοῦνται, δεινοτάτους εἶναι λέγειν.
ἡμῖν δ' ὑπάρχει τοῦτο κατὰ τύχην τινά.

Woman A: And how will a female-minded association of women address the people?

Praxagora: Quite well, if I'm not mistaken! For they say that the youths who are made love to the most are the most skilful speakers. And, by some luck, this is true for us too!

Eccl. 110–114

Praxagora is repeating the old joke,[13] but she is using it in a novel way: Praxagora claims for *women* the advantages of being a male politician, a *rhêtôr*, by virtue of the fact that both are σποδοῦνται (the verb can denote both hetero- and homosexual lovemaking).[14] As Ussher puts it, "Praxagora argues that even among orators, the most 'womanly' are also the best speakers. *Real* women should be better still."[15] It must be emphasized that this is a significant and perhaps unique claim in the Greek tradition: even the Athena of the *Oresteia*, while she may have used *peithô* in a political context, nevertheless was not characterized as a *rhêtôr* who might appear in the assembly.

What is more, since we know that Praxagora is not merely effeminate but a real woman, she retains the archetypal, feminine power of seductiveness. Women have long been seducers (Hera, Circe, Helen, the wife in Lysias 1: see p. 35); seduction has frequently been connected with political persuasion; Aristophanes here takes the next logical step and modifies the old *topos* by transforming women into seductive political persuaders. We accordingly find in the *Ecclesiazusaę* a woman who will dress up like a *rhêtôr* and attempt to persuade the Athenians. In short, Praxagora embodies the two sides of *peithô*: she can be both a persuader, giving a political speech, and a seductress, using erotic attraction to gain her ends. Furthermore, she takes advantage of her ambiguous status in that she has the appeal to men of the youthful speaker, who is the passive object of desire, the seduced, but as we know, and as Callicles discovered in his love for Demos, the seduced can be the seducer. Helen too was depicted as the seductress (*Odyssey*, for example) or the seduced (Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*).

By taking a traditional joke and applying it to a novel situation, Aristophanes has opened up new possibilities for the play and its characters. It remains to show in detail precisely how Praxagora is shown to be both seductive and persuasive.

C) *Praxagora as a* rhêtôr

We can begin with Praxagora's name. It is a perfectly legitimate critical practice to discover significant "meanings" in the names of Aristophanes' characters; after all, Lysistrata's name is transparent: she "undoes an army" and Dicaeopolis evidently wants a "just city." Praxagora's name

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[13] Huber 1974, 55, sees the joke here as nothing more than "das übliche negative Rednerbild der Komiker."

[14] Henderson 1975, 172; Taillardat 1965, 103.

[15] Ussher 1973, 90.

(Πραξαγόρα) which first appears at *Eccl.* 124, literally means "one who is active in the *agora*"[16] and is fitting for someone who would speak at the assembly, since the word ἀγορά is intimately connected with political life at Athens. Although in the classical period the physical entity that constituted the *agora* was for the most part a marketplace[17] and the *pnyx* was where the assembly actually met, it is clear that "marketplace" was not the exclusive or original meaning of the word: at *Odyssey* 2.10 Telemachus goes to the *agora* for an assembly and speeches.[18] And even in the fifth century the formula for asking someone to speak at the assembly (which Praxagora uses at *Eccl.* 130, six lines after her name was introduced—possibly etymologizing?) was τίς βούλεται ἀγορεύειν. The word ἀγορά had a host of political applications in composition: we have seen above that Praxagora's intention was to δημηγορεῖν (*Eccl.* 111).[19] Accordingly, a name ending in -αγόρα should be eminently suited to a *rhêtôr*.

Praxagora, by meeting the standards of the male political world and proving herself a capable *rhêtôr*, fulfills the promise of her name. Surely the best evidence of her eloquence is the speech she will give to the assembly. This speech and the preparation leading up to it take up virtually the first 300 lines of the play. Other women made attempts, but, through various mistakes, were unable to conceal the fact that they were women: they invoked goddesses, not gods: τὼ θεώ (155), Aphrodite (189); one woman accidentally addressed the assembly as women (γυναῖκες, 165, though she may have a good excuse, as noted above, p. 80 n. 11); one even persists in knitting (88). To their credit, however, they come to realize that they must wear the customary wreath (*stephanos*) when speaking (131, 148, 163). They also hold a staff (*baktêria*), which was particularly associated with men and with the *ekklêsia*.[20] In the *Ecclesiazusae* Praxagora instructs

[16] On the name see Pape 1880, s.v. Praxagora: "in der Volksversammlung tüchtig"; a more recent discussion is in Paganelli 1978, 231 n. 3.

[17] Of course Praxagora's reforms will also have an impact on the marketplace and the economy; see the case made by Foley 1982, 18 n. 3.

[18] See Ussher 1973, 93, for other parallels. ἀγορεύειν also described the discourse of the king in the *Theogony* (see above, p. 31 n. 33), who is speaking (ἀγορεύειν, 86) and does his work in the *agora* (89).

[19] The word for freedom of speech was ἰσηγορία; an advocate in the courts was a συνήγορος; the ultimate political authority was Zeus *Agoraios*. For Zeus *Agoraios* (especially at *Eumenides* 973) see Winnington-Ingram 1983, 168.

[20] Sosias in the *Wasps* dreams that even sheep will take their *baktêriai* when they go "to attend the assembly at the pnyx" (ἐνῇ πυκνὶ ἐκκλησιάζειν, 31 ff.); the chorus members in the *Acharnians* rely on their staves for support against the *neaniskoi rhêtores* (*Ach.* 682); the *neanias* described by Ephippus *comicus* (14*PCG* = 14K) dresses up and prepares to give a speech "having set down his bearing on a *baktêria*" (σχῆμα ἐπικαθεὶς βακτηρίᾳ, fr. 14.11). It is by striking her *baktêria* against the pavement that Praxagora will be able to convince people on a dark street that she is a man (*Eccl.* 546).

one woman to speak in the assembly like a man "supporting her bearing with the *baktêria*" (διερεισαμένη τὸ σχῆμα τῇ βακτηρίᾳ, 150), and when they prepare to leave for the assembly she issues virtually the same instructions: "Go, supporting yourselves on your *baktêriai*" (ταῖς βακτηρίαις ἐπερειδόμεναι, 276–7).[21] The women thus know the conventional use of the *baktêria* and are aware of its significance.

But in the end Praxagora feels that only she is capable of giving a speech; she takes up the *stephanos*, the wreath, signifying her position as speaker, and proceeds to denounce the way men have been running the city, offering the alternative of rule by women (171–240). The speech itself is concerned in part with *peithô* and the adequacy of political leadership. Praxagora laments the fact that if a leader is good (χρηστός) for one day, he is bad (πονηρός) for ten (177–78). She criticizes the waffling of the Athenians on matters of public concern (180–88). One of the speakers (*rhêtores*, 195) persuaded (ἀναπείσας, 196) the Athenians to join the Anti-Spartan League but he left the city when the Athenians backed out. The discourse of men has failed: the current leaders and their bad *peithô* act against the interests of the state.

Far from giving herself away as a woman who is unfamiliar with oratory, she positively shines, as modern critics generally agree: "a fine exercise in rhetoric,"[22] "so accurate is the parody that the speech would do credit to an actual speaker in the assembly."[23] She shows a wide knowledge of many of the rhetorical conventions that one would expect in a speech at the assembly. The speech falls into a coherent structure of *prooimion*, *diêgêsis*, *prothesis*, *pisteis* and *epilogos*.[24] Her opening prayer, an invocation to the gods, can be paralleled in surviving oratory, especially in Lysias and Demosthenes.[25]

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[21] For the use of the *stephanos* and *baktêria* in the assembly see Stone 1981, 213 and 246–7. In these passages from the *Ecclesiazusae* it may be that the *baktêria* has a phallic significance. While often meaning "bearing" or "shape," σχῆμα can also mean "equipage", i.e. female genitalia—as it does at *Eccl.* 482 (Henderson 1975, 117). Moreover, the verb ἐρείδειν can mean "support" but also "thrust against" in an obscene sense—as it does at *Eccl.* 616 (Henderson 1975, 171; Taillardat 1965, 102; Komornicka 1981, 78). Is it unreasonable to conclude that *Eccl.* 150 and 276 could be open to obscene interpretations: could the women be using the *baktêria* for sexual purposes? Sexual stimulation ought to help a *rhêtôr*, since it plays a part in his education. And if the *baktêria* has become a virtual *membrum virile*, then this gives Praxagora, holding it in her hands as she speaks—much as she held the lamp in her hand in the prologue—very considerable symbolic power over the affairs of men.

[22] Ussher 1969, 26.

[23] Murphy 1938, 110 n. 1.

[24] Murphy 1938, 111.

[25] Cf. Dem. 18.1. The same is true of her closing: "If you trust me you will spend your life in happiness" (239–40). Compare the end of Demosthenes 14: "If you do these things, Athenians, you will be acting advantageously."

On the other hand, Aristophanes had shown his acquaintance with such rhetorical commonplaces on many occasions in his previous plays; we saw earlier that the sophist Thrasymachus and the question of training a *rhêtôr* appeared in his *Banqueters*. In the *Thesmophoriazusae* as well two anonymous women give speeches (383–432, 443–458), although those speeches are less tailored to the general public or political issues than Praxagora's speech is.[26] Praxagora's speech surpasses these in its structural sophistication, and, in particular, in its use of ("so-called"?) Gorgianic rhetorical figures. These figures are virtually nonexistent in the surviving Aristophanic corpus—excepting parodies of Euripides and Praxagora's speech.[27] One notable feature is the frequency of antithesis, for example 182ff.: "Those on the one hand who are willing to be allies you fear, those on the other hand who are unwilling you plead with." Or 197ff.: "On the one hand it seems good to the poor man, on the other hand it seems bad to the rich." She also uses antithesis and isocolon at 199–200.[28] Of course this is not prose but trimeter, and in principle one expects to find the rhythmical devices that rhetoric borrowed from poetry, but in practice it is surprising that these Gorgianic figures are used so little elsewhere in Aristophanes. It is true that some Gorgianic figures would be common by the 390's,[29] yet they are largely absent from the *Plutus*. Harriott has observed that while speeches in tragedy share an affinity for rhetorical clichés, comedy is less able to incorporate them. Consequently rhetorical clichés stand out more conspicuously in comedy,[30] and the unusual concentration of rhetorical figures in the *Ecclesiazusae* may then be an intentional effect.[31]

The other characters in the play also seem to be convinced of Praxagora's ability, insofar as we can determine their judgement. One woman interrupts Praxagora's speech to say, "How clever (ξυνετός) the man is!" (204). ξυνετός is used only three other times in Aristophanes: at *Wasps* 633, for example, the chorus praises Philocleon for his speech defending the life of a juror;[32] here in the *Ecclesiazusae* it is a fitting compliment to Praxagora's oratory—and also to the woman who said it, since she remembered to use a masculine form. (Incidentally, the other women

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[26] Rechenberg 1966, 85.
[27] Murphy 1938, 111.
[28] Murphy 1938, 109–10.
[29] Murphy 1938, 111.
[30] Harriott 1986, 29.
[31] One might further speculate that the attention to rhetoric in the *Ecclesiazusae* has increased at the expense of paratragedy: the *Ecclesiazusae* has fewer identifiable instances of paratragedy than any other play; see the *Verzeichnis* in Rau 1967, 185.
[32] See also *Frogs* 879, 1490.

quickly learn to use the masculine form too: one—or all in unison[33]—calls her ὠγαθέ (213); in this way they gradually enter the male political world.)

After Praxagora's speech, another woman praises her for being δέξιος ("skilful"), and Praxagora tells them how she learned to speak so well: "I set up house with my husband among the refugees in the *pnyx*. Then, by listening to the *rhêtores*, I learned by heart (ἐξέμαθον)" (243–4). If this is how Praxagora learned her rhetoric, she would have been at no disadvantage to men trained by sophists, for this process virtually recapitulates the method that Gorgias used for instruction. Ancient evidence points to two distinct types of instruction in rhetoric; the first of these was that of Gorgias, Antiphon and Protagoras, in which speeches were assigned (such as the *Encomium of Helen*?) and were to be learned by heart. This was good, practical exercise, but it offered no theoretical instruction: that was the province of the second type, that of Tisias and Corax, who wrote technical handbooks or manuals.[34] Praxagora clearly belongs to the first school. True, she listened at the *pnyx* and did not pay for private instruction from a sophist, but her method of learning by heart (ἐκμανθάνειν) is that ascribed by Aristotle to Gorgias.[35]

Her remark that she literally lived in the *pnyx* is interesting for other reasons. It certainly illustrates the penetration of the *polis* by the *oikos*, the public by the private. In the *Ecclesiazusae*, however, the *oikos* is firmly associated with *erôs*: the lives of the women at home are shown to be involved, almost exclusively, with sex. In the prologue Praxagora indicated that her own lamp had been witness to vigorous sexual activity there. Nor is she alone: we have seen, in the last chapter, that one woman was "driven" all night by her "Salaminian" husband (39), another's husband coughed on "hairy fish bones" (=pubic hairs? 56) all night long.[36] Aristophanes makes it clear that they all have husbands at home: several are mentioned by name (35, 38, 46, 49), and two women are referred to only by their husbands' names (51), as would be common. By contrast, however, the *Lysistrata* names only one husband (*Lys.* 68), although of course several will appear on stage later in that play. Thus in the *Ecclesiazusae* women of the chorus are initially shown to be closely associated with their husbands in a specifically sexual way; they serve the physical needs of the men, as little more than sex objects. (To be sure, this

[33] Coulon 1930, gives it to all the chorus; a good example of the difficulties in attribution of lines in the prologue.

[34] Kennedy 1963, 52–4.

[35] For this description of Gorgias' teaching see Aristotle at the end of *Sophistic Refutations* 34 (183b36); similarly *Lysistrata* 1126–7.

[36] Ruck 1975, 47.

relationship will simply be reversed under the new scheme that Praxagora proposes, where men will be sex objects.)[37] Moving into the *pnyx* gave Praxagora a chance to listen to the demagogues in the assembly, and this accounts in part for her rhetorical training. But we recall that Praxagora herself had pointed out that youths had to be made love to in order to become *rhêtores* (*Eccl.* 112–14). Praxagora combines these two when she moves her *oikos* (a locus of sexual activity)[38] into the *pnyx* (the arena of political debate). Aristophanes has taken the *topos* about the *rhêtôr* and pederasty literally and transferred it (*mutatis mutandis*) to Praxagora, who, husband and all, moves into the focal point of the life of the *rhêtôr*.

Other remarks fill in details of this portrait. Shortly after telling how she moved into the *pnyx* Praxagora is called δεινὴ και σοφὴ ("clever and shrewd," 245). While δεινός could mean "clever with words" already in Herodotus (5.23), the particular combination of δεινὸς καὶ σοφός seems to have been a stock phrase for sophists.[39] In the Aristophanic corpus the phrase appears only in one other passage, referring to the notoriously slippery politician Theramenes in the *Frogs*: σοφός γ' ἀνὴρ καὶ δεινός (968). The phrase seems to be reserved, then, for sophists and *rhêtores*.

Heberlein thinks that the chorus' praise of Praxagora (571–82, immediately before the agon) is also in terms that are appropriate for a sophist. She has "keen intelligence" and "philosophical shrewdness" (πύκνην φρένα καὶ φιλόσοφον φρόντιδα, 571), and an "inventive power of the tongue" (γλώττης ἐπίνοια, 573).[40] That she should overcome the opposition in the assembly with a shout (βοῇ, 434) is characteristic of demagogues; Cleon is described as doing this at *Knights* 276, 286. Praxagora's advocacy of "new" things (220, 456, 573, 586–7), also seems sophistic.[41]

The reaction of the men is telling as well. When Blepyrus' friend Chremes returns from the assembly, he tells Blepyrus that he noticed an unusually large number of rather pale-faced young men (of course the audience knows that these are the women) and that one of them got up to give a speech:

> μετὰ τοῦτο τοίνυν εὐπρεπὴς νεανίας
> λευκός τις ἀνεπήδησ' ὅμοιος Νικίᾳ

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[37] MacMathuna 1971, 194.

[38] Although Blepyrus has a mixed record here; see below pp. 96–97.

[39] Ussher 1973, 108; Guthrie 1971, 32 n. 1; Protagoras was described as δεινὸς καὶ σοφός in Plato's *Protagoras* (341a9).

[40] Heberlein 1980, 59–60. Compare ἐγγλωττογάστορες of the Athenians at *Birds* 1695 ("Claptraptummies" is Arrowsmith's translation).

[41] Heberlein 1980, 59–60; cf. Aristotle *Athenaion Politeia* 28 on Cleon.

δημηγορήσων, κἀπεχείρησεν λέγειν
ὡς χρὴ παραδοῦναι ταῖς γυναιξὶ τὴν πόλιν.

Then, after this, some handsome youth, pale, like Nicias, jumped up, and he was trying to say that it was necessary to hand over the city to the women.
Eccl. 427–30

It has been suggested by S. Saïd that Praxagora had failed in her attempt to be a convincing politician because she did not look more like a grown man.[42] But I suggest that the opposite is the case: she fits the model of the youthful yet articulate *rhêtôr* in Ephippus fr. 14, cited above. We have already seen that there are several correspondences in the description of dress and bearing between *Eccl.* 427–30 and the Ephippus fragment. Casting Praxagora as the *erômenos* gives her an *entrée* into the political world.

In addition to being a capable *rhêtôr* she is also versed in the ways of *erôs*. Already in her opening monologue, an address to the lamp she is holding, she has the air of a very experienced woman. She apostrophizes the flame as "the shining eye of a wheel-driven lamp," yet as Ruck has pointed out lamps were not thrown on the wheel but molded, and "turning" here may suggest sexual experience.[43] Praxagora "rouses" the lamp to give the agreed-upon signal (6); it "stands by those who have experience in Aphrodite's turns... it alone illuminates the forbidden recesses of the thighs, singeing the hair which flowers there; it stands by women as they open just slightly the storehouse full of harvest and Bacchic fluid" (9–15). The language is rather suggestive.[44] The association of lamps and lovers is scarcely unique to this passage; the tradition is a long one in Greek poetry.[45] Lamps were accomplices for women in sexual activities at home: difficult to relight in the ancient world, they were sometimes simply kept alight all night long. Thus the eye (ὀφθαλμόν, 11) of the lamp can "see" and supervise the goings-on in the bedroom. In any event, the prologue certainly presents a woman of considerable *savoir-faire* who admits in her speech that women are prone to take lovers (225); she is certainly not one to preach abstinence.

Even after she shows herself to be a *rhêtôr*, she still insists that she can use her experience in κρούματα (sexual congress) in parliamentary procedure,

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[42] Said 1979, 39.
[43] Ruck 1975, 34; cf. *Lysistrata* 845–46 where a wheel is the cause of Kinesias' torture.
[44] Ruck 1975, 34–35; Ruck's translation may be over-suggestive, but gets the point across.
[45] For a discussion see Kost 1971, 126–132. Lamps and lamp-stands appear on Greek vases of love-making: Sutton 1980, 98.

implying that the thrust and parry of legislative debate requires erotic skills.[46] As such it can only enhance the power of *peithô*. Certainly her physical appearance in the assembly will be helpful; her disguise as a youth (νεανίας) is part of her appeal. Praxagora would have appeared to the men as a somewhat effeminate youth, and this sexual ambiguity or androgynous quality—suggesting more erotic possibilities, not fewer—would make her all the more attractive (see also below, pp. 98–100).

But she is able to play a variety of sexual roles. Blepyrus seems to suspect his wife is unfaithful, and is quite willing to believe, when she returns home, that Praxagora has been to see a lover—or even several lovers (523).

Βλ. αὕτη, πόθεν ἥκεις, Πραξαγόρα; Πρ. τίδ', ὦ μέλε,
σοὶ τοῦθ'; Βλ. ὅ τί μοι τοῦτ' ἔστιν; ὡς εὐηθικῶς.
Πρ. οὔτοι παρὰ τοῦ μοιχοῦ γε φήσεις. Βλ. οὐκ ἴσως
ἑνός γε. Πρ. καὶ μὴν βασανίσαι τουτί γέ σοι
ἔξεστι. Βλ. πῶς; Πρ. εἰ τῆς κεφαλῆς ὄζω μύρου.
Βλ. τί δ'; οὐχὶ βινεῖται γυνὴ κἄνευ μύρου;
Πρ. οὐ δὴ τάλαιν' ἔγωγε.

Blepyrus: Say there, where are you coming from, Praxagora?
Praxagora: What's it to you, dear?
Blepyrus: "What's it to me"!? How silly!
Praxagora: You're not going to say I'm coming from a lover.
Blepyrus: Probably not just from one.
Praxagora: All right, then, you can prove it yourself.
Blepyrus: How?
Praxagora: See if I am perfumed with myrrh.
Blepyrus: What! A woman can't make love without myrrh?
Praxagora: I can't.

Eccl. 520–526

The test she offers of her innocence—seeing if she is wearing myrrh— can only reinforce his suspicions: she denies having seen a lover, but, in the same breath, spells out exactly how she would have gone about it.

Praxagora's erotic skill becomes even more apparent when she is compared with Lysistrata. Certainly the *Lysistrata* is at least as concerned with sexual and political issues as is the *Ecclesiazusae*, but in different ways, since in the former sex is withheld as an effective tool for punishment, whereas the *Ecclesiazusae* ends by promising universal availability of sex.

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[46] For the obscene meaning of κρούματα see above, p. 50 n. 22, and Henderson 1975, 171.

The protagonist Lysistrata, however, though often likened to Praxagora as an emancipated woman taking bold and radical initiatives,[47] is in many respects quite different. Compared with Praxagora, Lysistrata is disappointingly chaste. It is not entirely clear that she has a husband,[48] and she is divorced from home life. She has no sense of humor[49] and avoids the lewd language that Praxagora indulges in.[50] She is the one woman in the play who is able to resist the temptation of sex, whereas the wives who do give in are portrayed as somewhat ludicrous; even Myrrhine needs strict instruction before she is allowed to tempt her husband.[51] We sense that she is mature since she is addressed as ἄνασσα ("mistress," 706), ἀνδρειοτάτη ("manly," or "stubborn," 1108), σέμνη ("haughty," 1109), and is rather dour (σκυθρωπός 7, 707),[52] whereas Praxagora is called the more familiar φιλτάτη (54), γλυκυτάτη (124), and ὦ μελ' (120, 133, 245). One can agree with David Barrett, who finds "the character of Praxagora better drawn and more interesting than that of Lysistrata in the earlier play: her encounter with her husband, when she has to bluff her way out of an awkward situation, gives her an extra comic dimension, which Lysistrata lacks."[53] One explanation of Lysistrata's characterization is the possibility that she may have been recognized as Lysimache, the priestess of Athena,[54] so we would expect a less seductive and more matronly performance.[55] One might even say that her strategy of fortifying the Acropolis is a masculine one,[56] and if it may be too much to speak of a "masculinization" of Lysistrata[57] neither is she particularly feminine. One thinks of Gladstone's comment that Athena has "gender but no sex."

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[47] Bruns 1896, 179; Dover 1972, 190. Both Lysistrata and Praxagora "are treated with a deference due to leaders of state": McLeish 1980, 74–75.

[48] Henderson 1980, 167, 176, says there is no husband that we hear of. If he does exist, he is the ἀνήρ at 514 who brushes aside her questions; at any rate, he has no role in the play. At the very least, Lysistrata is not compelled to sneak away from her husband the way the other women do: Sommerstein 1980b, 412 n. 17.

[49] As Schmid 1946, 330, puts it, "Sie macht keine Witze."

[50] A point made by Kaibel 1896, 982. I am aware that many regard characterization in Aristophanes as inconsistent (see Dover 1976; Bain 1984) but this should not deter us from seeing that there are real differences between characters such as Praxagora and Lysistrata.

[51] Henderson 1980, 187.

[52] Foley 1982, 9.

[53] Barrett 1978, 218.

[54] Lewis 1955, 1–12; supported by Sommerstein 1980b, 396; see now Henderson 1987a, xxxviii.

[55] She also aligns herself with the older women (*Lys.* 706ff.); see Henderson 1987b, 108.

[56] For this point I am indebted to my student, Cheryl Villa.

[57] Whitman is anxious to deny any masculinity even when she is called "Lysistratus" at *Lys.* 1105: Whitman 1964, 202.

Lysistrata's rhetorical abilities differ from Praxagora's. It is true that Lysistrata does invoke the goddess Peitho (203), and she says that she learned to speak by listening to her father and the old men (1124ff.).[58] Yet she never acts like or is characterized as a *rhêtôr*: nowhere is she said to δημηγορεῖν, nowhere is she called a *rhêtôr*, δέξιος, ξυνετός, or δεινὸς καὶ σοφός. She is called δεινός once (1109) but not with specific reference to her speaking ability. The speeches she gives in the play are not quite as formally structured, as antithetical, or as adaptable to the assembly.[59] None of this is to say that she fails to use *peithô*, but that she does not do so in the way that Praxagora does. Lysistrata lets Myrrhine do the real work and stands above the fray, on the Acropolis; Praxagora is a *rhêtôr* of the *pnyx*, very much in the thick of things.

Praxagora's special position in the play is reinforced by the imagery of childbirth. We have seen that Praxagora's excuse for her absence was that she had to help a friend (ἑταίρα καὶ φίλη, 528) who was in labor. When she mentions some lines later that the friend gave birth to a male child (a male was always more valuable), Blepyrus thinks she meant the *ekklêsia* gave birth.

Βλ. οἶσθ' οὖν ἀπολωλεκυῖα πυρῶν ἑκτέα,
ὃν χρῆν ἔμ' ἐξ ἐκκλησίας εἰληφέναι;
Πρ. μὴ φροντίσῃς· ἄρρεν γὰρ ἔτεκε παιδίον.
Βλ. ἡκκλησία; Πρ. μὰ Δί' ἀλλ' ἐφ' ἣν ἐγῴχόμην.

Blepyrus: You know, then, that you have lost the measure of grain that I was supposed to have gotten from the *ekklêsia*?
Praxagora: Don't worry about it. After all, she gave birth to a boy.
Blepyrus: Who did, the *ekklêsia*!?
Praxagora: No, the woman I went to!

Eccl. 547–50

Blepyrus, without realizing it, has hit on the truth.[60] In a certain sense the *ekklêsia* has given birth—to a new social order. The metaphor of birth is hardly strained in its application to politics.[61] We saw in the last chapter

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[58] She is in part quoting Euripides' *Melanippe Sophe* here—evidently Melanippe was shown to be particularly eloquent, though that skill she claimed from her mother (fr. 484, Henderson 1987a, 197); see Rau 1967, 201 and Foley 1982, 9–10.

[59] Though she is quite eloquent at 1128–36; on this speech see Henderson 1987a, 198.

[60] Which is typical of him: Huber 1974, 104.

[61] Aristophanes used it in the *Frogs* when Dionysus, describing the misfortunes of Athens, says, "The city is in difficult labor" (ἡ πόλις γὰρ δυστοκεῖ, 1423); see Taillardat 1965, 446 n. 2; for the *polis* giving birth see also Theognis 39, 1081; Dover 1968b, xliii, notes the freedom with which τίκτειν and γεννᾶν were used in a metaphorical sense.

that this birth accompanied Blepyrus' "death" and was followed by his revivification. Here we add a second level of meaning to Praxagora's (figurative) midwife role: she has not only animated her husband but also presided over the enactment of a new social order. We may see here—inasmuch as birth is the logical result of *erôs*—an extension of the intersection of *erôs* and politics that we have followed in this study.

What is here a figure of speech finds a sort of realization later in the play. Since sexual relations will be virtually indiscriminate, it will be impossible to know one's parentage (635), so anyone and everyone could claim to be a son or daughter (644ff.). They are children, then, not of individuals but offspring of a new political arrangement enacted in the *ekklêsia*; the *ekklêsia* has literally given birth.

Aristophanes did not endow his characters with a great deal of psychological realism or depth of characterization; they are often two-dimensional and show little development.[62] Praxagora, in particular, is on stage for only half of the duration of the play. Yet, caricature though she may be, she is virtually an allegorical figure of *peithô* and is unique in the comic tradition.

D) *Praxagora and Aspasia*

The picture of Praxagora that I have sketched has a degree of historical plausibility. We can identify a precedent—or at least parallel—for her: Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles. It would be impossible to prove that Praxagora is modelled on Aspasia, who was a metic and *hetaira*; nevertheless in several ways Aspasia represents a similar juncture of *peithô*, *erôs* and politics. Aspasia may have been dead for many years—at least we know nothing of her after 428 B.C.—but, as we saw in Chapter Two (pp. 35–36), she was thought to be a woman of considerable learning and abilities as a teacher of rhetoric.[63] Her reputation as an effective teacher and practitioner of oratory was matched by her *savoir-faire* in erotic matters—as well as by her own attractiveness. Plutarch says that her affection for Pericles was of a "rather amatory" sort (μᾶλλον ἐρωτική, *Pericles* 24), and that even after marrying Pericles she kept a house of courtesans. The chorus of the *Acharnians* insist that the Peloponnesian War was caused by the theft of two of Aspasia's prostitutes (*Ach.* 527,

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[62] See (for example) the remarks of McLeish 1980, 127.

[63] Ehlers 1966; Judeich 1896, 1720; Cantarella 1987, 53–55. Field 1948, 118, sees Aspasia as the embodiment of the emancipated women, though Wilamowitz 1900, 451–53, doubts that any historical emancipation movement existed.

Aristophanes' only reference to her). Athenaeus (5.219d) said she was Socrates' preceptor in love (ἐρωτοδιδάσκαλος) as well as in rhetoric. In comedy she was compared with Helen, Deianeira, and Omphale.[64] Antisthenes seems to have taken an unfavorable view of her and used her in his dialogue as the embodiment of sensual pleasure (ἡδονή).[65]

Aeschines was more sympathetic in his *Aspasia*, some of which can be reconstructed from fragments. It appears that Socrates advises Callias to send his son to Aspasia for instruction; when Callias is surprised that Socrates should recommend that a man be educated by a woman, Socrates points to some of the great women of history. In a passage of the dialogue translated by Cicero (*de Inventione* 1.31.51), Socrates, in order to illustrate her ability to teach, recounts how Aspasia attempted to reconcile Xenophon and his wife by suggesting the proper attitude they should have toward one another: if they both want to have the best spouse possible, they should both strive to become precisely that for each other. Ehlers suggests that Aeschines' dialogue emphasized the extent to which women could use their sexual attraction to lead their lovers to virtue (*aretê*).[66] But *erôs* is also a means to political power. Ehlers points out that Aspasia's use of *erôs* in politics stands in contrast to that of Lysistrata, who puts *erôs* to a negative use by means of a sex-strike.[67]

Several points of contact between Praxagora and Aspasia are inescapable:

1) Both are capable orators: Aspasia would have given a speech had she the opportunity; Praxagora enacted what Aspasia aspired to.[68] We might also note that they both use Gorgianic rhetoric: Philostratus' anecdote (see p. 36) has Aspasia molding Pericles' oratory in Gorgianic fashion; Praxagora's speech, as has been noted, uses a high degree of Gorgianic figures. Moreover Aspasia was called a tyrant (τύραννος) by Eupolis (294*PCG*=274K)—an acknowledgement of her powerful influence in politics. Aspasia's renown as a teacher (διδάσκαλος: *Menexenus* 235e, Athenaeus 5.219b) resembles Praxagora's accomplishments in the *Ecclesiazusae*: her task is to explain the new system, and she is repeatedly described as teaching or expounding (διδάσκειν 215, 514, 583, 662). There is a correspondence in their method of teaching or learning rhetoric: Praxagora learned her speeches when she lived (ᾤκησα, 243) next to the

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[64] Henry 1985, 14; and, like Helen, she was said to have instigated the Samian and Peloponnesian Wars.

[65] Taylor 1934, 22; Ehlers 1966, 31–3.

[66] Ehlers 1966, 138–9. Cf. the remarks on Plato in Halperin 1986, 60–80.

[67] Ehlers 1966, 57 n. 77.

[68] Ussher, too, sees Praxagora "in the enlightened tradition of Aspasia" (1973, 108).

pnyx; similarly Aspasia taught her second husband Lysicles by living with him.[69]

2) Aspasia, by profession, is knowledgeable in matters of *erôs*. Praxagora is a housewife, yet she is hardly the model of restraint that Lysistrata is. If we follow Ehlers' distinction between a positive and a negative use of *erôs*, Praxagora is clearly on the side of Aspasia: she has not committed adultery that we know of, but she certainly seems to know exactly how she would go about it (522–26). Moreover the new society is the opposite of that which Lysistrata's sex-strike imposes; Praxagora's society does away with nearly all restraints—one need only take one's proper place in line.

3) Both are able to use their power, based on *erôs*, to achieve their political ends. Aspasia—at least in the eyes of the Socratic Aeschines—used her allure to inspire politicians to become better orators or, as Aristophanes would have it, to start the Peloponnesian War. Praxagora, by her performance as a *neaniskos*, and by offering laws that do away with sexual barriers, makes the new society more attractive to Blepyrus and the Athenians.

4) The testimony of Cicero (see also Xenophon *Mem.* 2.6.36; *Oeconomicus* 3.14) indicates that Aspasia was regarded as a matchmaker and judicious advisor on proper relations between husband and wife. Could the *Ecclesiazusae* be an elaborate parody of this? Aristophanes' play does, after all, cut the Gordian knot: one may choose, within the prescribed guidelines, the most desirable mate; the last scene of the play illustrates the complications of this. Aspasia and Praxagora offer different solutions, but address a similar problem.

Ehlers (p. 46), eager to emphasize the unique position of Aspasia, is inclined to see Praxagora as an average middle-class housewife. Yet the similarities should not be overlooked. This literary tradition of Aspasia flourished in the early fourth century: the *Menexenus* dates from 387 B.C., only five years later than the *Ecclesiazusae*; Aeschines, a contemporary of Plato's, would have written his *Aspasia* in this period;[70] Antisthenes may have written his *Aspasia* at any time before his death in 360 B.C. It is perfectly plausible, then, that Aristophanes was influenced by the tradition, and that his portrayal of Praxagora reinforced the notion of a woman skilled in rhetoric as well as erotics. At the same time Praxagora may have served as a model, or a further precedent, for the Aspasia depicted in Plato and

[69] As luck would have it this anecdote is preserved only in the Syriac translation of pseudo-Plutarch, and the Greek original is not certain, but is likely to have been συνοικήσασα: Ehlers 1966, 76–7.

[70] Ehlers 1966, 46, suggests that the *Ecclesiazusae* was produced a few years before Aeschines' *Aspasia*.

Aeschines. In any event, each exemplifies the power of *peithô* in remarkably similar ways.

D) *Men and women*

While Praxagora can be placed in the context of early fourth-century Greek culture, she also has an important role in the history of the comic genre, the significance of which becomes apparent when her portrayal is compared with that of men. On this issue we can turn to feminist criticism: Linda Bamber's description of the heroine of Shakespearean comedy—the young woman for whom Praxagora is a prototype—offers a helpful analogy.[71]

> The feminine Other, then, is Shakespeare's natural ally in the mode of festive comedy. Precisely because she is Other, precisely because her inner life is obscure to her author, she seems gifted wih precisely the qualities that make for comedy: a continuous, reliable identity, self-acceptance, a talent for ordinary pleasures. It has often been noticed that the comic hero seems dull next to the brilliant heroine; apart from Benedick (in *Much Ado*) and Berowne (in *Love's Labour's Lost*), who share many of her virtues, the heroes seem a little dazed and inept, as though they wandered in from some other play. They are unfit for comedy because they take themselves too seriously; they are too much the male Self, imposing themselves aggressively on the situation.

"Self" and "Other" are, for our purposes, equivalent to "male" and "female" respectively.[72] The concepts are more useful for tragedy than for comedy: Bamber herself admits that in comedy the Self is more elusive, often being a select social group or unimpressive male hero;[73] it is not what catches our imagination. Yet, if we momentarily ignore the Self-Other distinction, Bamber's account of the state of affairs between men and women in Shakespeare is remarkably like that in the *Ecclesiazusae* and suggests further avenues of investigation;[74] it certainly calls attention

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[71] The passage quoted is from Bamber 1982, 41.

[72] When Bamber speaks of the "Self" she refers to the masculine perspective of the playwright that governs the play or the characters that a male audience would identify with; the male tragic hero, for example, with his inner sufferings, would thus find sympathy among the spectators. The "Other" is what is unlike this male Self and challenges it. It represents external forces, and will often be associated with the feminine (Clytaemestra, Lady MacBeth), who is less likely to reveal her inner feelings. Whether in tragedy or comedy, the masculine Self is what has more substance and is what is more vulnerable to serious suffering or change. Bamber 1982, 6–8; cf. Zeitlin 1985, 66–67.

[73] Bamber 1982, 27.

[74] Bamber's account, I might record here, is spared the scathing attack directed against other feminist scholarship of Shakespeare by Levin, 1983, 125; the criticisms of Goldberg 1985, 116–135, are directed at more specifically Shakespearean or Elizabethan questions.

to the role of the heroine as a foil to the men. Moreover, the issues at stake are frequently those that involve *peithô*: it is in this sphere that the men show themselves especially dull and the women gifted.

Blepyrus is typical of the men in the *Ecclesiazusae*; he is indeed "dazed and inept," to use Bamber's words, and it is to belabor the obvious to say that he lacks the persuasive and seductive abilities to succeed in politics. He never shows the ironic awareness that we find in the male protagonists of earlier comedies, such as Dicaeopolis or Peisetaerus; of the character-types McLeish has postulated for the major Aristophanic roles, he most closely fits the βωμολόχος ("buffoon") type.[75] His name reinforces this impression: although it does not lend itself to any one transparent meaning, Paganelli has stressed that the βλεπ- element in "Blepyrus" (from βλέπειν, "see") would confirm Blepyrus' passivity: while Praxagora is an active participant in politics, Blepyrus merely looks on, like a cow at a passing train, and is at most a spectacle for other onlookers (ἀποβλέπομαι, 726).[76] Rejuvenated or not, he is no civic activist.

His entrance, which recalls those of the protagonists of the *Acharnians* and the *Clouds*, might cause one to wonder whether he has in fact "wandered in from another play." The play's essential intrigue had been set in motion while he was asleep, and he will never know precisely why his wife was wearing his clothes; the comic irony—our knowledge of his ignorance—is inevitably at his expense. His dullness next to the heroine has been discussed in the last chapter (pp. 55–60): he is no match for her intelligence and wit, is incapable of seeing through her evasive replies when he confronts her about her suspicious early-morning absence (520–553) and only slowly comprehends the new society she explains in the *agôn* (583–688). Nor does it occur to him to defend the status quo; when the new social plan is described to him his questions and objections focus on the plan's consequences for him (460–475). Blepyrus is too late to participate in the assembly, so we do not see what sort of a speaker he might make; after all, his foremost concern seems to be that he has lost his *triôbolon* (380, 392). Nothing he says demonstrates political acumen or rhetorical ability. Moreover, he takes himself seriously, indignant that his wife should think to slip out of the house without telling him and wear his clothes. This is an unwelcome encroachment on his prerogatives and his attempts to reassert his authority when she returns are hollow.

That he should be inadequate in matters of *erôs* follows logically in this play. As we saw in the last chapter, he is an old man (323) who has

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[75] McLeish 1980, 55.

[76] Paganelli 1978, 231–235. Cf. the name "Blepsidemos" in the *Plutus*.

married a younger woman, and worries that in the new social arrangement he will not be able to perform sexually. He may regain sexual potency by the end of the play, yet he does not control the outcome of the play and is the object, not the agent, of erotic *peithô*.

The other man who encounters women is the youth of the episode late in the play. He too attempts to "impose himself on the situation" but is, in the end, undone by the women. His inefficacy may foreshadow the tradition in later comedy of young male lovers who are unable to get the girl they love without help, and are, like Adonis, easily defeated.[77]

To turn to the heroine: Praxagora's abilities and virtues have already been enumerated. It is she, if anyone in the play, who has, to use Bamber's words, "self-acceptance" and "a talent for ordinary pleasures." She is the sanest of the play's characters, neither arrogant nor naive; she will recover, with a vengeance, the "ordinary pleasures" for Athens. Part of the power of a female heroine in comedy is her unmarried status; Shakespearean comic heroines are frequently unmarried (until the end of the play, of course). Unlike Lysistrata and the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Praxagora must answer to a husband who would be stern and watchful. Yet obviously he is no hindrance: she disguises herself in the assembly, tells lies about her whereabouts, and does away with monogamous marriage anyway. The absence of children in this marriage might cause us to question whether it has any sexual aspect at all. She has thus been liberated from constraint, and, although not openly promiscuous, becomes more available, therefore more attractive to men. Finally, we do not sense a private, interior Self, unseen and unstable—that would be unusual in comedy anyway—but it is this lack of an inner life, Bamber suggests, that gives her a "reliable identity." This, in turn, allows us to focus on her outer appearance rather than her inner psychological state, and frees her to disguise herself.[78]

It is in this context that we turn to the question of transvestism, which in general can have a variety of uses: mere farcical humor, sexual arousal, an illustration of metatheatricality,[79] a festive reversal of order, a means of deceit, or a play on identity. In the case of Blepyrus it is possible that dressing in his wife's clothes was intended to be metatheatrical or festive in a general sense, but it was certainly not meant to

[77] Keuls 1985, 28.

[78] The other women—the Athenian wives, the girl waiting for her lover and the old hags—are not characterized well enough to confirm these assertions about women, but neither do they contradict them: they are static and give away little of themselves.

[79] See Taaffe 1987 for a reading of the *Ecclesiazusae* as a metatheatrical comedy; my concern, however, is with what transpires within the fictional world of the play.

deceive: no one thinks he is a woman and there is no true comic irony.[80] I think, however, that simple humor is the most reasonable explanation. He immediately establishes himself as a butt for ridicule by wearing his wife's dress and groping blindly in the dark to find a place where he can relieve himself (311–326).[81] That the color of his gown should be mistaken for excrement (328–331) speaks for the debasement this scene conveys, and the incident might be compared with the carnivalesque abuse of a costumed king.[82] Zeitlin suggests that in tragedy a man who is weakened or "acutely aware of his body" often feels woman-like;[83] Blepyrus' constipated state certainly calls attention to the discomfort of his bodily functions. If there is a deeper significance it is, I think, what we saw in the last chapter (pp. 56–59): his female dress symbolizes his impotence whereas a change into male dress—though admittedly we do not know exactly when he changes—would accompany renewed potency at the end of the play; he must, so to speak, lose his sexual identity in order to rediscover it.[84] He resembles Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, rendered helpless when dressed as a woman,[85] and thus Praxagora shares the potency of the effeminate stranger in that play, Dionysus.

Praxagora's crossdressing has different purposes. We can point to a specific festive source for women dressing as men: the Skira. Moreover, a metatheatrical significance is more plausible when the women dress as men, especially since they don their costumes in the first scene, which is tantamount to a dress rehearsal for the assembly.[86] Praxagora is not the butt of humor in this play; it is she who ridicules the men, and the male clothing she wears is intended to deceive, which she does successfully, and this is perfectly consistent with her role as an agent of *peithô*. But more interesting than these is the question of sexual ambiguity: her appearance to others at the *ekklêsia* is of a sexually ambiguous adolescent. To be sure, she never registers doubts about her femininity; her own identity seems secure enough and the ease with which she dons male clothes suggests self-confidence—unlike Blepyrus, who is conspicuously uncomfortable in his wife's clothes and unsure of his virility. We are

[80] See Howard 1988, 423–24, on the differences between male and female transvestism; cf. MacCary 1981, 294. That they should wear women's clothing illustrates their confinement to the *oikos*, suggest Foley 1982, 14, and Saïd 1979, 35.

[81] As Henderson observed (1975, 102 n. 52), Blepyrus' wife is at the highest point in the city, while he is literally at the lowest in this defecation scene.

[82] Cf. Bakhtin 1968, 197ff.

[83] Zeitlin 1985, 69.

[84] Frye 1965, 76–78; cf. Zeitlin 1985, 65.

[85] Goldhill 1986, 123.

[86] Taaffe 1987, 122.

certain that she takes off her husband's clothes (lines 493ff.), and her personality continues to be recognizably the same.[87] Shakespearean heroines offer striking analogies here. Praxagora lacks the depth of Viola, Portia or Rosalind, but other similarities are inescapable: all dress as young men, are pleasing in appearance to older men, are verbally articulate and "clearly are the dominant figures in their worlds."[88] Viola, says Malvolio, appears "not yet old enough for a man nor young enough for a boy" (*Twelfth Night* I.v), and she possesses verbal skills: "I would be loath to cast away my speech; besides that it is excellently well penned, I have taken great pains to con it" (I.v). Portia, who speaks "between the voice of man and boy" (*Merchant of Venice* III.iv), actually enters a court of law in disguise to conduct the prosecution of Shylock (IV.i). Rosalind, a "pretty youth" (*As You Like It* IV.i), has been taught to speak well (III.iii) and is a counselor in love (III.ii)—it is poetically appropriate, then, that in disguise she went by the name of Ganymede.[89]

In comparing Praxagora with them, we should observe that the precise nature of erotic appeal will differ between Elizabethan England and fourth-century Athens, because sexuality is in part historically and culturally determined. Once again, it should be restated that we are dealing with fictional characters that tell us less about women than about male, or at least Aristophanic, notions of what women are. It has been suggested that in Shakespeare, when the heroine is sexually ambiguous, it is her maleness that makes her desirable; upper-class males in Elizabethan London seem to have resembled Greek aristocrats in their expression of erotic interest in one another.[90] Like the Shakespearean heroines, the role that Praxagora plays when in disguise is that of the attractive adolescent. Chremes' admiringly describes her as a "handsome young man" (εὐπρεπὴς νεανίας, 427), echoing Euripides' description of the effeminate Agathon.[91] The desirability is unquestionably that of the *erômenos*, whom we have discussed above in connection with rhetoric, and to some extent

[87] Perhaps it is a mark of Blepyrus' inner weakness that, in contrast to Praxagora, we are never explicitly told that he finally puts on his own clothes.

[88] Rackin 1987, 31.

[89] So too the god Eros was sometimes portrayed as an androgynous adolescent: Frye 1965, 82–3; MacCary 1981, 295, 300. Youthful appearances are common in comic transvestism: "In Plautus, Shakespeare and Beaumarchais, when there is transvestism it is a boy as a young woman, or of a young woman as a boy, never of a mature male as a mature female or a mature female as a mature male," MacCary 1981, 295.

[90] It is impossible to make a non-controversial statement about women in Shakespeare, but I follow here Jardine 1983, 9–36, and MacCary 1985, 55–61. On crossdressing see also Belsey 1985, 166–180; Rackin 1987, 29–41; Howard 1988, 418–40.

[91] *Thesmophoriazusae* 192: εὐπρεπής; compare λευκός, *Th.* 191, with λευκοπλήθης, *Eccl.* 387.

the appeal to the *erastês* was based on the maleness of the passive partner. This is to be expected since there is generally little in earlier Greek literature that attests to erotic or romantic desire of men for young women, unless in a crudely sexual context.[92] In one sense, it did not matter whether the object of one's desire was male or female: the crucial distinction in sexual relations—and this extended to social status—was between active and passive, superior and subordinate, in which a hierarchy of power, not mutual gratification, was the aim.[93] The portrayal of the politician as still passive was insulting: citizens who "sought to seduce the people in order to rule over them, such as Cleon or Agyrrhius, were also individuals who had consented to play the role of passive, obliging objects."[94] One would think that a passive man could not dominate the city. Yet this is not quite the case; one recalls that Callicles, ostensibly the *erastês*, would utter any absurdity to please Demos, son of Pyrilampes; the tail wags the dog, as it were, and this is the precedent that Praxagora follows: even as merely "subordinate" she can dominate in the way that Demos son of Pyrilampes did—but avail herself of rhetoric, that glib and oily art. The Shakespearean analogy does not take us much farther, because Praxagora and the women remain in a position of power even after the disguise has been dropped, unlike the heroines of Shakespeare who submit to marriage.

However important the dominant/subordinate category was, Greeks did distinguish between men and women and we have already seen (in Chapter One, pp. 21–23) that in the fourth century the portrayal of women in Greek art increasingly emphasized their erotic appeal, just as the portrayal of men began to stress their effeminacy. Homosexual desire for a male partner cannot alone account for the attractiveness of a sexually ambivalent figure such as Praxagora, and it is worth considering that women are here attractive in their own right, as women.[95] The desirability of an androgynous figure, unlike Elizabethan drama as Jardine sees it, can stem not from its maleness but its femaleness.

Although MacCary has proposed that "Menander seems to have discovered the capacity of women for attracting men's desire,"[96] it is more

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[92] Henry 1985, 10–11; Brendel 1970, 29–36; see above, pp. 22–23.

[93] See above, p. 22 n. 111; Foucault 1985, 215–25. Joan Scott has pointed out that in medieval Islam the symbols of political power alluded to sex between man and boy; in such a society, like classical Greece, women are excluded from power altogether (1986, 1071).

[94] Foucault 1985, 219–20.

[95] As we saw earlier (p. 23 n. 113), Dover 1978, 73, speculated that effeminate appearance in boys may have stimulated homosexual desire more in the fourth century than in the fifth.

[96] MacCary 1985, 58.

plausible that the discovery had already been made in comedy by Aristophanes. In fact one can surmise that such a desire as this has been aroused when Myrrhine teases her husband Kinesias in the *Lysistrata* (870–951) although in that play it still takes place on a relatively crude, purely sexual, level. But the scene between the youthful lovers in the *Ecclesiazusae*, with their lyric song to Eros, is, even if thwarted, closer to the spirit of romantic love in New Comedy.[97] And we recall that it was Aristophanes who initiated the "rape and recognition" pattern, characteristic of New Comedy, with the *Cocalus*.[98] Tender romance between a young man and woman is found on vase painting already in the fifth century, indicating that "the theme of affection between youth and hetaera was common long before New Comedy."[99] In Menander the *hetaira* becomes a figure of considerable moment; one thinks of the sympathetic treatment and importance to the plot of Chrysis in the *Samia* or Habrotonon in the *Epitrepontes*. Habrotonon emerges there as the relatively selfless agent of the restoration of social order; it is she who can manipulate men, who "is quick to connect events and to take charge," who "comes to represent *the* feminine perspective in the play,"[100] and who calls on the goddess Peitho for assistance. Praxagora, I suggest, is the forerunner of this: not without erotic attraction, her marriage has become irrelevant, blurring the distinction between her and Aspasia, and she is, while on stage, the only character in the play who can use *peithô* to restore the social order.

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[97] Webster 1970, 23.
[98] *Vita* XXVIII.54–5; Koster 1975, 135. See above, pp. 24–25.
[99] Sutton 1980, 108.
[100] Goldberg 1980, 63–4.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

The *Ecclesiazusae* is the first surviving drama from the period after the upheavals of 404/3 B.C., and I have come to regard it as an expression of the restored democracy. The play is not an attack on the follies of the demagogues: if Agyrrhius is ridiculed it is more as a man than as a politician; otherwise Praxagora only speaks once of bad leaders (*Eccl.* 178), and the problem with the speakers at the assembly (393–426) is not that they are demagogues but that they are so bad at it. Aristophanes is sympathetic to the principle that the stability of the government must rely on the consent and obedience of the *dêmos*, and, while no great defender of demagoguery, he understands that the persuasion which wins this consent must depend on affective means. Praxagora is therefore not a deceptive manipulator, but a quick-thinking leader. Genuine support of the democracy would square with the change others have detected in Aristophanes' sympathies, if J.-C. Carrière is correct in seeing an increasing tendency in Aristophanes' later plays to criticize aristocrats, or if Alan Sommerstein has rightly postulated an outright left-wing conversion.[1] This would also square with the spirit of the times, as my discussion in Chapter One has, I hope, made clear. An additional example might reinforce the point: even in Plato, who we would conventionally expect to oppose the democracy, it is possible to find support for it. In his study of the *Crito*, Richard Kraut suggests that "Socrates is quite pessimistic about the chances of there ever being a better form of government than democracy."[2] The *Crito*, like the *Ecclesiazusae*, shows that it is necessary, for a stable society, to encourage civic loyalty and obedience to the laws, and to reject private self-interest. In this enterprise *peithô* is decisive: the "good orator," who has "given study to the art of words" (to use Isocrates' expression) will be instrumental in winning adherence to public needs.

In her article on the *Clouds*, Martha Nussbaum suggested that Aristophanes (like Plato) saw democracy as inadequate to turn men toward virtue because it could not overcome the force of the ego.[3] Left to

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[1] Carrière 1979, 170; Sommerstein 1984a, 314–33; see above p. 6 and n. 31.

[2] Kraut 1984, 208. That Socrates would be so sympathetic is a controversial claim and has been contested by Orwin 1988, 171–76; followed by Kraut's rejoinder pp. 177–82.

[3] Nussbaum 1980, 95.

themselves the citizens may indeed behave as they do in the penultimate episodes of the *Ecclesiazusae*. But *peithô*, since it draws on the power of *erôs* and affective forces, meets private motivations on their own terms, and, since it draws on inspiration from within the individual (*erôs*), is at least as potent as the offer of the *triôbolon* in encouraging the *dêmos* to transcend self-interest. It can bridge the competing claims of public and private interests. Far from being about the dangers of demagoguery, the play is about the potential advantages of leadership in building a community. In the right hands *peithô* is a benevolent and indispensable force in democracy.

Of course a woman is the leader, not a man. This is the logical result of several converging factors: (a) the blurring of lines between women and the attractive youth trained in rhetoric, a stock figure in comedy; (b) the long-standing tradition that women have verbal skills; (c) the growing awareness of the quality of feminine seductiveness in the fourth century. Like Aeschines' Aspasia, who would lead her students to *aretê*, Praxagora can (where allowed) inspire the *dêmos* to greater civic responsibility. The society organized by the women is comic—a "bubble of soap that is broken on contact with the real world"[4]—and yet (like other satirical utopias) it is not completely absurd nor are the women necessarily subjected to ridicule. Like Lysistrata and the women of 411 B.C., the women of the *Ecclesiazusae* can assure the continuity of the community.

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[4] Roos 1951, 12–13.

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